

IN THE GRIP OF MINOS

CONFESSIONAL DISCOURSE IN
DANTE, CORNEILLE, AND RACINE



MATTHEW SENIOR

In the Grip of Minos: Confessional Discourse in Dante, Corneille, and Racine

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"An interesting and intellectually adventurous book on an important subject . . . a vigorous piece of work that at its best creates genuine intellectual excitement."

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Tracing the history of confession from the Desert Fathers through the Lateran decree (1215) and the Council of Trent (1543–63), Matthew Senior examines the significance of these events and the role of confessional discourse in works by Dante, Corneille, and Racine.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, Senior focuses his study on Minos, the legendary king of Crete and judge of both Homer's and Virgil's underworlds. Dante transforms Minos into a demon who forces the souls of the damned to confess as they enter the underworld; likewise, the ritual of confession opens the gates of Purgatory. Dante's afterlife, according to Senior, is an extrapolation of the Lateran decree, a total vision of humanity governed and punished by its own verity.

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OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
COLUMBUS

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Senior, Matthew J. (James), 1952–

In the grip of Minos : confessional discourse in Dante, Corneille,
and Racine / Matthew J. Senior.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8142-0637-9

1. French drama—17th century—History and criticism.
2. Christian drama, French—History and criticism.
3. French drama (Tragedy)—History and criticism.
4. Corneille, Pierre, 1606–1684—Religion.
5. Dante Alighieri, 1265–1321—Influence.
6. Racine, Jean, 1639–1699—Religion.
7. French drama—Italian influences.
8. Christianity and literature.
9. Confession in literature.

I. Title.

PQ615.S46 1994

842'.409382—dc20

94-7123

CIP

Text and jacket design by James F. Brisson

Type set in Palatino by Graphic Composition, Inc., Athens, Georgia

Printed by McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., Saline, Michigan

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council
on Library Resources. ∞

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

TO
JENNIFER

Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.
Ah! combien frémira son ombre épouvantée,
Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée,
Contrainte d'avouer tant de forfaits divers,
Et des crimes peut-être inconnus aux enfers!

Racine, *Phèdre*

L'homme, en Occident, est devenu une bête d'aveu.
De là sans doute une métamorphose dans la littérature: d'un plaisir de raconter et d'entendre, qui était centré sur le récit héroïque ou merveilleux des "épreuves" de bravoure ou de sainteté, on est passé à une littérature ordonnée à la tâche infinie de faire lever du fond de soi-même, entre les mots, une vérité que la forme même de l'aveu fait miroiter comme l'inaccessible.

Michel Foucault

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to three teachers and friends without whose encouragement and assistance I could not have completed this book: my father, John Senior, whose love of literature and pursuit of the truth set the standards to which I aspire; Lawrence Kritzman, who took an interest in my work and my career, read portions of my manuscript, and whose critical insight is matched only by his generosity; and Charles G. S. Williams, whose editorial skills and knowledge of seventeenth-century literature have been a veritable resource on which I have relied.

I would also like to thank Tom Keenan for granting permission to quote from the unpublished Foucault lectures that he transcribed at Dartmouth and for making available to me his vast *Bibliothèque Foucault* when we were both graduate students at Yale. My readers at the Ohio State University Press—Mitchell Greenberg and my anonymous reader—challenged me with their insights and suggestions. I hope I have met their expectations.

Stewart and Susan Curtis provided assistance with the illustrations. Win and Jack O'Connor read several chapters of my text and made many valuable suggestions. Rima Reck helped me in obtaining a grant from the Research Council of the University of New Orleans, which allowed me to take time off from teaching during the final editing process. Victoria Althoff and Ruth Melville of the Ohio State University Press provided expert and courteous help with production and editing. As a final expression of gratitude, I mention the origin of this study: a letter I received from Michel Foucault in 1980, encouraging me to pursue the subject of confession and seventeenth-century literature.

Introduction

PÂLEUR JANSÉNISTE: RELIGION, LITERATURE, DISCOURSE

All of Racine's work, and *Phèdre* in particular, has often raised the question among critics about the relation between literature and religion. The debate has taken many forms; for some it is a question of deciding whether the play is predominantly Christian or Greek. Chateaubriand characterized *Phèdre* as "une épouse chrétienne." According to the Hellenist R. C. Knight, Racine "a fondu ensemble l'héroïne éhontée de Sénèque et l'héroïne pudique d'Euripide" (343). The idea of a "Phèdre janséniste" goes all the way back to Arnauld's supposed remark that Racine's tragic victim was "une chrétienne à qui la grâce a manqué." Racine himself surely contributed to this kind of interpretation by writing in his preface to the play that *Phèdre* was an object lesson in Christian morality in which "les moindres fautes sont sévèrement punies." The dramatist saw his play as a chance to reconcile tragedy with "quantité de personnes célèbres par leur piété et par leur doctrine qui l'ont condamné dans ces derniers temps"—a clear reference to Nicole and the other Jansenist opponents of the theater.

The link between Jansenism and *Phèdre* had become such a cliché by Proust's day that the young hero of *La Recherche* goes to his first theatrical representation fully expecting to see "cilice chrétien, pâleur janséniste" and "Princesse de Clèves et de Trézène" appear on stage. His literary idol, Bergotte, has so filled his head with these impressionistic labels that the real performance of the play turns out to be a disappointment. There is no readily apparent Jansenist pallor, and, at first, he even prefers the acting of the secondary characters to that of the famous Berma.

The incident serves as an ironic lesson about the secondary cultural production that accompanies an artistic heritage. Marcel is a naive, incompetent spectator because he has not yet learned to see *Phèdre* with the same eyes as his bourgeois culture: a composite aesthetic object in which moral rigor, aristocratic distinction, and hystericized femininity are combined in a timeless essence. For us the incident is a challenge to go beyond Bergotte's nebulous phrases in search of a more rigorous and historically aware model of cultural *mediation*, one that can explain *Phèdre* as an aesthetic, ascetic, and erotic object of desire. The lesson of Proust is also that, like Bergotte, we cannot avoid projecting some of our own methodological obsessions onto *Phèdre*.

I begin by surveying some of the recent attempts to define the relationship between *Phèdre* and Port-Royal. Meticulous comparisons of the Greek and Latin sources with Racine's text have lead Maurice Delcroix and Antoine Adam to conclude that the seventeenth-century dramatist borrowed so heavily from his sources that there is little room for "la thèse janséniste": "N'est-il pas significatif que de tous les vers de la tragédie, ceux qui pourraient nous paraître les plus visiblement inspirés par le jansénisme, soient précisément la traduction d'un développement de Sénèque?" (Adam 4:371). In the same spirit, other critics have disqualified the Jansenist theory because none of the technical terminology of Jansenist theology is employed in Racine's writings. Unless there are "certaines propositions nettes touchant le péché originel, la grâce et la liberté de l'homme," there is no basis for calling the play Jansenist (Backès 148).

Given the fact that Racine wrote neoclassical plays and not theological treatises, one could hardly expect to find extended discussion of religious doctrine in his plays. Mediation must not be so narrowly conceived that only an explicit reference to a theological issue can qualify as a Jansenist element. Likewise, the identification of a "source" does not rule out reference to contemporary issues. Because a passage is based on Seneca does not deprive it a priori of possible Jansenist echoes in its new context. There are less philological and positivistic ways of establishing the intertextual relation between the sacred in Racine's plays and specific religious movements of his day.

MEDIATION: MEANING IS EVERYWHERE

Lucien Goldmann first proposed a more complex way of relating Jansenism to Racine. Drawing on the early Lukács's theory of tragedy, he

sought to establish a connection between Racine and Jansenism on the basis of a similar "world vision." This is the set of beliefs shared by a class: "Une vision du monde, c'est précisément cet ensemble d'aspirations, de sentiments et d'idées qui réunit les membres d'un groupe (le plus souvent, d'une classe sociale) et les oppose aux autres groupes" (26). The group in this case is the robe nobility, and their tragic world vision reflects their political eclipse under absolutism.

Referring to the last chapter of Lukács's *Die Seele und die Formen*, Goldmann defines the tragic as "une crise profonde des relations entre les hommes et le monde social et cosmique" (51). He adopts a chronological scheme in which the tragic world vision follows a period of triumphant rationalism, to be succeeded, in turn, by a dialectical system. The seventeenth-century tragic thinkers, Pascal and Racine, are, according to this interpretation, a reaction against the individualistic, rationalistic worldview of Descartes and Corneille. They express the anxiety of a subject adrift in a cosmos without divine structure and a world without a transindividual human community (41). It is a world devoid of value under the gaze of a cruel, hidden God whose very existence can only be assured by the "pari." Living under these conditions, one can either abandon the world, like the "solitaires," or follow the more tragic path of answering the hidden God's absolute imperative of living in the world. This is the "refus intramondain" that Goldmann finds in *Phèdre* and the *Pensées*.

Many detailed objections can be raised against Goldmann's thesis: Is the "pari" a permanent disposition of the believer in Pascal? Of what use is so narrow a definition of the tragic that it only applies to three of Racine's plays? Can Pascal's texts be called "tragic" in the same sense as Racine's, since it is only in the latter that we encounter the tragic myths? But these questions are secondary to a larger methodological objection to the concept of *world vision*.

This approach maintains that all cultural productions have a discernible consistency about them because they are all projections of the *same* ideal structure, derived causally from economic circumstances. Racine is a "Jansenist," like Pascal, because his work finds its coherence and its ultimate explanation by reference to an idealistic construct—the *noblesse de robe's* world vision. No allowance is made for the differences between Racine and Pascal, or between them and Lukács for that matter; there is one tragic essence, and all cultural manifestations of this view are so many signifiers of the same homologous signified. Thus, under Goldmann's analysis, Racine's plays become direct expressions

of Jansenist theology, albeit a humanist Marxism's version of that theology, for example: "Le Soleil de *Phèdre* est, en réalité, le même Dieu tragique que le Dieu caché de Pascal, de même qu'Andromaque, Junie, Bérénice et *Phèdre* sont les incarnations concrètes de ces 'appelés' dont la reconnaissance constitue dans *l'Écrit sur la Grâce* un des critères pour différencier les jansénistes des calvinistes" (352). *Le Dieu caché* is a great pioneering effort to illuminate literature from a totally social perspective, but its version of mediation, of how one discourse relates to another, must be abandoned in favor of a model capable of respecting the specificity of cultural objects.

Marxist critics now speak of the "relative autonomy of instances," meaning that superstructural phenomena do not simply reflect prevailing infrastructural realities. The idea of a single underlying worldview has also been abandoned. Each cultural production has its own specificity, and the relation it bears to economic or other cultural formations is not one of simple replication. Fredric Jameson has proposed the term *transcoding* to describe how the different spheres of cultural production can be related to one another. This conveys the idea of a constant rewriting and recasting of cultural representations from one level to another. He defines the critic's job as "the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or 'texts,' or two very different structural levels of reality" (*Political* 40). The word *transcoding* has obvious psychoanalytic overtones; Jameson says elsewhere that the rhetoric of the unconscious must be used to understand how the different cultural sectors are related: "production, projection, repression, displacement and the like" ("Religion" 44).

Jameson's version of mediation is based on Louis Althusser's concept of "structural causality." It is a vision in which meaning and causality in society are not read from an infrastructure upward but rather derived from the total system: "a mediation that passes through the structure rather than a more immediate mediation in which one level folds into another directly" (41).

Religious discourse is of particular interest because it is "the symbolic space within which the collectivity thinks itself and celebrates its own unity." We are at the core of Jameson's methodology here because a transcoding of the text which includes religious discourse enables the critic to make the essential mediation: "All literature, no matter how weakly, must be informed by what we have called a political un-

conscious; all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of the community" (70).

A similar desire to depart from the classical Marxist version of mediation characterizes the work of Michel Foucault, and it is from his writings that I borrow two concepts central to this study: *discourse* and *dispositif*. In *L'Ordre du discours* Foucault describes discourse as "une violence que nous faisons aux choses" (55). This is perhaps the best definition of the word; it suggests that language is more than just a transparent medium for human interaction and technical achievement. It also separates Foucault's approach from the older, materialistic determinisms.

"Le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer" (12). Much of Foucault's work is devoted to analyzing the rules that organize language into definable discourses capable of exerting the kind of power alluded to in this passage. The reason discourse is the object of struggle and control is that it empowers a whole range of individuals and institutions to intervene in people's lives. Authoritative discourses give the doctor, the judge, the teacher, and the critic the right to intervene in their area of competence. Rules of "rarefaction" limit access to certain discourses; censorship limits certain forms of expression; normative discourses establish the boundary between madness and reason.

Foucault envisages cultural unity as being achieved by a mediation between discourses and the work of the critic as consisting in establishing "séries discursives." Like Althusser, he insists on the autonomy of cultural instances; the order of discourses is not determined by mechanical laws or inherent ideal laws: "Enfin, s'il est vrai que les séries discursives et discontinues ont chacune, entre certaines limites, leur régularité, sans doute n'est-il plus possible d'établir entre les éléments qui les constituent des liens de causalité mécanique ou de nécessité idéale. Il faut accepter d'introduire l'aléa comme catégorie dans la production des événements" (*Ordre* 61). A given society is nothing more than a fortuitous *series* of discourses: "Les discours doivent être traités comme des pratiques discontinues, qui se croisent, se jouxtent parfois, mais aussi bien s'ignorent ou s'excluent" (55). Here is where Foucault parts company with even the most Hegelian Marxists by his denial of any evolutionary or dialectical laws of history.

In his later work Foucault added two important dimensions to his discursive approach: he focused more on the positive, solicitous nature

of some discourses, and he developed the concept of the *dispositif* to include nonlinguistic phenomena in his cultural analyses. He felt that he had been too idealistic in his approach, too concerned with written and spoken codes. In his work on the history of prisons and the history of sexuality he included a wide range of written and unwritten codes and practices that societies have used to define their sexuality and govern their prisons. In an interview he defined the *dispositif* as:

Un ensemble résolument hétérogène, comportant des discours, des institutions, des aménagements architecturaux, des décisions réglementaires, des lois, des mesures administratives, des énoncés scientifiques, des propositions philosophiques, morales, philanthropiques, bref: du dit, aussi bien que du non dit, voilà les éléments du dispositif. Le dispositif lui-même, c'est le réseau qu'on peut établir entre ces éléments. ("Jeu" 63)

The language of the last sentence reveals the same sort of purely relational vision of society that we saw in Jameson and Althusser. Society exists only as the total equation of its many local operations. There are no privileged expressions of its essence. To paraphrase one of Foucault's aphorisms, meaning is everywhere.

L'AVEU

As indicated above, the other tendency of Foucault's last work on discourses was his interest in the positive aspect of some discursive practices. His earlier insistence on rarefaction and censorship gave way to a study of practices in which subjects were not repressed and excluded from expressing themselves but rather encouraged, even forced, to speak. People are subjected to power/knowledge not only in what they are forbidden to say, or in what authoritative pronouncements are made on their behalf, but also, and perhaps most insidiously, in what they themselves say when they take up the task of stating their own subjectivity, putting it into words, making it available to the various moral, legal, medical, and other normalizing institutions at work in society.

Foucault's prime example of this kind of discourse was the practice of avowal, which seems omnipresent in Western societies: "L'aveu a diffusé loin ses effets; dans la justice, dans la médecine, dans la pédagogie, dans les rapports familiaux, dans les relations amoureuses, dans

l'ordre le plus quotidien, et dans les rites les plus solennels; on avoue ses crimes, on avoue ses péchés, on avoue ses pensées et ses désirs, on avoue son passé et ses rêves, on avoue son enfance; on avoue ses maladies et ses misères" (*Hist. Sex.* 1:79).

Here I believe we have found a specific kind of discourse and a theory of cultural mediation especially promising for the study of Racine, Jansenism, and a whole range of questions involving literature, religion, and society. Since avowal is, as Foucault says, "diffused" so widely within our culture and our history, its study should be particularly capable of producing the kind of serial vision of societies that our most sophisticated sociological critics advocate.

From the desert communities of primitive Christianity to Dante's total vision of humanity, from the pulpits, stakes, and confessionals of the Counter-Reformation to the alcoves and stages of court society, the confessional *dispositif* will prove to be one of the essential networks that define subjects and societies.

CONFESSION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: DE TERTULLIEN A FREUD

In 1881 Bertha Pappenheim, the pseudonymous Anna O. of the *Studies on Hysteria*, was relieved of her hysterical symptoms by "talking them away" to her physician, Joseph Breuer. Anna suffered from bouts of depression, headaches, visual impairments, nervous cough, and a curious loss of her native German tongue—all attributable to a stifling domestic life and the burden of caring for her dying father. Breuer found that, under hypnosis, Anna could recall traumatic experiences related to her father's illness and death and that the recounting of these events eased her symptoms. It was Anna herself who named this process (in English) her "talking cure." The case contained, Breuer would later claim, "the germ cell of the whole of psychoanalysis" (qtd. in Gay 64). It was this case, related by Breuer to his understudy, Sigmund Freud, that proved decisive in the emergence of psychoanalysis.

It sparked the young Freud's interest in hysteria and hypnosis and turned him away from the prevailing somatic explanations of mental illness. Abandoning the neurological laboratory in favor of Charcot's amphitheater in Paris, Freud began the search for purely psychological explanations for his patients' symptoms. The idea of the unconscious (*das Unbewusste*) appears for the first time in Freud's writings in the *Studies on Hysteria*, and henceforth this concept, not brain pathology,

would be the focus of his diagnosis and treatment. Anna O. had discovered and named the essential tool for access to and treatment of the unconscious.

Over a period of ten years the talking cure would be refined: the "fundamental rule" and free association were substituted for hypnosis, and the transference phenomenon was added to the mechanisms of the cure. But it was Anna O. who had first opened up to psychiatry her "private theater" and named the process whereby the verbalization of that inner reality cured her. Was this event so pristine a moment of methodological breakthrough that it could be fittingly named only by a hypnotized twenty-two-year-old woman? Pure serendipity? Or had Breuer and Freud not stumbled, knowingly or not, onto a method of relieving hysteria and guilt through speech which had a long history in the West? Was Anna O. not predisposed psychologically by her milieu, with its historical accumulation of discursive practices, both to repress her sexuality and to seek relief through avowal? Is Anna O.'s illness and treatment evidence not only of the "secular advance of repression," alluded to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but also of a parallel secular advance of confession?

It will be one of the contentions of this study that Anna O.'s "private theater" and her talking cure, the actors, scenario, and plot in this medical drama (patient and doctor, consulting room and oppressive bourgeois interior, dutiful daughter and dying patriarch), were all anticipated, culturally, by a millenary tradition of talking cures of the soul, verbal performances that territorialize the self, dividing it into inner and outer domains and submitting it to medical-religious authorities empowered to reconcile it with the community at large. It is a history that we will trace in its strictly religious origins, but also in its spilling over and "recoding" in other cultural domains, specifically in the literary creations of three authors whose work resonates with decisive moments in the history of confessional discourse.

There are hints of the link between religious confession and psychoanalysis in Freud's earliest writings. *Studies on Hysteria* uses the German word for confession to describe the effects of the talking cure: "The injured person's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely 'cathartic' effect if it is an adequate reaction—as, for instance, revenge. But language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be 'abreacted' almost as effectively. In other cases speaking is itself the adequate reflex, when for instance, it is a lamentation or giving utterance to a tormenting secret, e.g. a confession [*Beichte*]!" (2:8).¹

In *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Henri Ellenberger states that although the Reformation abolished the sacrament of confession, certain Protestant communities continued to practice a "Care of Souls" (*Seelsorge*) based on the belief that a secret transgression, usually sexual in nature, could lead to nervous disorders that only confession could relieve. The idea of the "pathogenic secret" circulated widely among clerics and laymen in the 1880s and 1890s and was first systematized as a basis for psychotherapy by the Viennese physician Moritz Benedikt. Freud refers to Benedikt's ideas in the "Preliminary Communication" (1893) as being "the closest approach to our theoretical and therapeutic statements" (2:8). This reference is, in a sense, the closest thing to a "smoking gun" connection between the tradition of Christian confession and the therapeutic practices of Freud's day. But Freud's implication in the history of confession is more pervasive than a footnote to an obscure physician. The confessional constitution of the subject comes to Freud from many sources, some of the most important being literary.

Freud addresses the question directly in *The Question of Lay Analysis*, to which I will return shortly after some further qualifying remarks about the continuities and discontinuities between confession and psychoanalysis. I will outline briefly the similarities and differences between psychoanalysis and confession in order to avoid the impression of an essentializing, anachronistic imposition of psychoanalytic concepts upon what I maintain was its ancestor—confession. It is a point that Foucault was at pains to emphasize in his own work: "Je ne cherche pas à construire avec cette notion d'aveu, un cadre qui me permettrait de tout réduire au même, des confesseurs à Freud. Au contraire, comme dans *Les mots et les choses*, il s'agit de mieux faire apparaître les différences" ("Jeu" 82). There are always two methodological moments in Foucault's historiography: the genealogical and the archaeological. The events of the past are viewed simultaneously as intimately linked to the present but also as archaeologically cut off from our age, buried in different epistemological strata than our own period. Present-day instances of *aveu* are thus historically unique, but also part of a "machinerie d'aveu" that, as Foucault once said in an interview, runs "de Tertullien à Freud" ("Jeu" 78). We must try to see these practices from the double perspective of archaeology and genealogy.

Of course, archaeology and genealogy are metaphors for the way discourses evolve over time. Cultural practices are neither artifacts waiting to be uncovered by an archaeologist nor genes to be traced by

a geneticist from one generation to the next. But the words usefully suggest how the same practice is both a hybrid formed of preexisting "genes" and a unique artifact located in a specific cultural stratum. Psychoanalysis is made up of prior elements drawn from medicine, religion, and literature which coalesced in a single moment to form a unique discourse. There are, as a consequence, always analogies between psychoanalysis and confession. Point by point one can establish these similarities which prove that the talking cure derives historically from confession. But just as important are the crucial differences that appear in the study of these analogies and that prove the radical difference between analysis and confession. Let us take a look at some of the similarities and differences.

1. Transference and the other scene. In confession, as in analysis, the believer performs a ritual that takes its meaning from another scene. The confessant addresses his or her *pater peccavi* not just to the priest but most essentially to a transference father in heaven. The other scene of Christian confession is the spiritual world of heaven and hell, time and eternity, sin and forgiveness. The other scene of analysis is the unconscious and its repressed memories and childhood fantasies. The analyst allows himself to be a surrogate for the real father so that the analysand can reenact forgotten traumatic events and gain mastery over them. The difference lies in the fact that analysis encourages the patient to dramatize his or her hostility toward the father, which is viewed as normal, universal, and admissible. The hostility is cathartically released by free expression. In Christian confession the expressivity of the words and the accompanying emotions are important, but the confessant is supposed to feel contrition, not aggression. In Christianity, grace and forgiveness are conferred by the transference father; in analysis, only the patient can heal himself by imaginatively enacting a relationship with a human father whose real participation in the cure is irrelevant.

2. The power to relieve symptoms. Several similarities and differences appear here. In *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926), Freud discusses the difference between confession and psychoanalysis in the form of a dialogue. The question is posed: "You assume that every neurotic has something oppressing him, some secret. And by getting him to tell you about it, you relieve his oppression and do him good. That, of course, is the principle of confession." Freud responds: "In confession the sinner tells what he knows, in analysis the neurotic has

to tell more. Nor have we heard that confession has ever developed enough power to get rid of actual pathological symptoms"(20:189).² According to Freud, only psychoanalysis obliges the confessant to delve into his or her unconscious and search out the hidden causes of neurosis. This comparison is true concerning simple confession, but there are more sophisticated techniques of spiritual direction which go back to the Desert Fathers. In the monastic communities of the East, monks were obliged to reveal all of their thoughts (not just sins) to a spiritual director who then deciphered those thoughts as originating from either God, the devil, or the monk's own unconscious. They employed a hermeneutics that resembles psychoanalysis on several points.³

The distinction would be less the technique than the underlying world vision and the nature of the outcome. One is a spiritual pardon, an absolution in which an expected punishment for sin in an afterlife is suspended, the other a metaphorical medical cure. Psychoanalysis was invented by physicians, it was called a "cure," and its language is couched in scientific neologisms. *Abreagieren*, *Übertragung*, *Durcharbeitung*, *Agieren*—these are the terms Freud developed for the phases of the cure. The analysand comes to a doctor with some expectation of being healed in the manner in which modern internal medicine is capable of healing the body. The old religious guilt is replaced by a non-judgmental attitude that dispels excess guilt and restores psychic energy to a repressed subject. All analysis asks of its adherents is the courage of enlightened self-knowledge; its healing powers are based on the knowledge and emotion that issue from the subject's confession; the uncensored outpouring of the self leads to both intellectual insight and an emotional replay of past traumatic events, both of which effect the cure.

Confession was likewise called a cure, and the priest was considered a doctor. The Lateran decree describes him as an "experienced doctor who applies wine and oil to the wound and inquires of the sinner the circumstances of his sin." Besides the obvious differences in the kind of medical science that serves as a metaphor for confession here, there are other major differences between the religious scene of confession and psychoanalysis.

The religious confessant is in the grip of sin and the devil. Speaking of missionaries soliciting confessions in seventeenth-century France, Bernard Dompnier says that their methods were based on one assumption: "Le pécheur est un prisonnier de Satan" (213). They drove this

message home in their sermons to the extent that people actually reported seeing the various devils that possessed them. "Bientôt, des pécheurs ébranlés par la prédication reconnaissent que Satan leur apparaît ou leur parle, soit lorsqu'ils commettent certains péchés, soit la nuit. Quelquefois, la mission est le théâtre de scènes de possessions" (214). Such terror culminated in the salutary "aveu de bouche," which defeated the devil and liberated the beleaguered sinner. The faithful hastened to confession to deliver themselves from a hidden menace that had suddenly manifested itself in the community.

Reflecting on such scenes, however, one recalls Freud's pronouncement on the difference between confession and analysis: "Nor have we heard that confession has ever developed enough power to get rid of actual pathological symptoms." Confession certainly had enough *power* at its disposal in centuries past, and this power could lead to a relief of "pathological symptoms." Dompnier says that in the seventeenth century, spiritual anxiety and guilt often led to somatic disturbances that ecclesiastical authorities readily interpreted as the consequences of sin. Confession could both relieve guilt and cure symptoms: "Elle [la confession] arrache en effet les corps à la tutelle du diable, soit dans le cas des possessions, soit dans celui des maladies qui—rappelons-le—sont souvent présentées par les ecclésiastiques du temps comme des conséquences du péché" (214).

3. Possession and alienation. Although in *The Question of Lay Analysis* Freud insists on the difference between psychoanalysis and confession, elsewhere in his writings he sees the analogy between his cases and those of demonic possession from the past. Speculating in a letter to Fliess that "the medieval theory of possession, held by the ecclesiastical courts, was identical with our theory of a foreign body and a splitting of consciousness," he asks why the confessions of possessed women under torture were "so like the communications made by my patients in psychical treatment" (1:242). Freud explains the parallel in terms of the seduction theory. Like his hysterical patients, the possessed, by their language and mimetic symptoms, are acting out details of the seduction scene.

Catherine Clément sees the coincidence as evidence of a continuing persecution of female sexuality under the guise of the witch and the hysteric. Speaking of hysterical symptoms as metaphorical signs written on the body, she writes: "Poids subversif du retour du refoulé, évaluation du pouvoir de l'archaïque, puissance ou non de l'imaginaire

sur le symbolique et sur le réel, c'est là le coeur de l'histoire qui lie ensemble la figure de la sorcière et celle de l'hystérique" (Cixous and Clément 22). The sorceress and the hysteric act out a recalcitrant female sexuality that is linked to paganism and bisexuality. These scandals of female sexuality must be exorcised through confessional rituals; the witch and the hysteric must take upon themselves all that is "unnatural" and inadmissible about human sexuality.

Shortly after the letter to Fliess maintaining that the devil in possession cases was in fact the childhood seducer, Freud shifted to the theory of infantile sexuality. Henceforth, the hysteric's symptoms were no longer fragments from an actual seduction scene but rather *fantasies* of being seduced, childhood wishes directed toward the father. But this only intensified the inquisitorial aspect of analysis: the patient had to admit to harboring a desire for the father or his surrogate (e.g., Herr K. in the Dora case).

Thus although psychoanalysis maintains that the devil is a persecutory image of the father and that the external alienation present in possession cases signifies the estrangement of the conscious from the unconscious, both the exorcist and the analyst resort to confession as a means of bringing about a cure. In exorcisms it was believed that if the "Father of lies" could be engaged in conversation and forced to state his name, he could be dislodged from the body of his victims. This conviction was so strong that, in the face of scarce evidence, exorcists often tortured confessions out of uncooperative subjects. Urbain Grandier, the Jesuit priest accused of demonically possessing the Ursuline nuns of Loudun, was mercilessly tortured in an attempt to extract a confession. Aldous Huxley describes the attempts of the exorcist, Father Lactance, to defeat the devil by forcing Grandier to confess:

[Grandier] was bound, stretched out on the floor, with his legs, from the knees to the feet, enclosed between four oaken boards. By driving wedges into the space separating the two movable boards, it was possible to crush the victim's legs against the fixed framework of the machine. . . . One of the new wedges was inserted between the boards and this time it was Father Lactance who swung the mallet. "*Dicas!*" he shouted after every blow. "*Dicas, Dicas!*" (231, 234)

Lactance wanted a confession to justify the death sentence that was imposed on Grandier, but he also wanted a verbal victory over the

devil. He wanted to unleash Grandier from the power of Satan. The torture would stop if the accused would only speak, just as the hysterical symptom would disappear if the patient could be induced to talk. One can see in Freud a descendant of Father Lactance, another wielder of power/knowledge exercised by those who insist on the confession of the subject. Foucault and Clément draw the parallel in order to shock modern readers into recognizing the power wielded by therapists, ministers, and police. Behind the analyst, Foucault wants us to see the exorcist: "On avoue ou on est forcé d'avouer."

In a recent study of confession, Jeremy Tambling has addressed this question and chosen to take issue with Foucault, Deleuze, and Jacques Donzelot, who characterize Freud as an oppressive, normalizing scientist: "Far from psychoanalysis colluding with forms of confessional knowledge, it has the capacity to put into question precisely the repressions and interdictions forming the basis of religious confession and of societal restraint" (182). It is undeniable that psychoanalysis undermines religious confession by deculpabilizing much sexual behavior ostracized by Christianity and by seeking to eradicate unwarranted guilt, not sin. The question is whether Freud replaced a religious ritual—by definition for Freud an obsessive ceremony designed to ward off repressed desires—with an equally coercive practice based upon pseudoscientific norms. Freud ends up pathologizing and discriminating against "perverse" sexualities with the same methodology and zeal as the moralists.

Tambling sees in Freud's later work an attempt to dismantle "the Oedipal representation of things," a project he shares with the Nietzsche of *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*. By this he means an attempt to liberate the subject from its infinite indebtedness to the past and the patriarchal order. Along with many others, let us say that if Freud is to be excluded from the list of normalizing scientists and abusive confessors, it must be done by emphasizing the other Freud, the scientist who admits that theory itself is propelled by a drive, a *Wissstrieb*; the autobiographical author who constantly sets himself up to be psychoanalyzed by his readers; the grammatological psychologist whose final model of the mind is the text. The uniqueness of Freud in the history of confessional discourse is the fact that his text furnishes the tools for its own deconstruction. We will return to the liberatory potential inherent in Freud's use of literature shortly, but there remains a final key distinction to be drawn between psychoanalysis and confession.

4. Religious versus secular epiphany. At the core of Christian confession is a spiritual, mystical event. St. Augustine, addressing himself to God, says: "Thou are there in the hearts of those that confess to Thee" (*Confessions*, chap. 5, p. 165). Confession undoes evil through verbal reenactment, and it brings God into the heart of the believer; it is a divine epiphany. In another passage from his commentaries on the Psalms, Augustine equates confession with spiritual life itself. The sinner, like Lazarus, is dead and bound by his sins until Christ calls him forth: "The Lord Himself with His voice aroused him from the tomb, restored his life by crying unto him, overcame the mass of earth that was heaped upon the tomb." The sinner hears this call from God and leaves the tomb by confessing: "When thou hearest a man is sorry for his sins, he hath already come again to life; when thou hearest him by confessing lay bare his conscience, he is already drawn forth from the tomb" (Schaff vi, 500).⁴

The basis of psychoanalysis is a different sort of epiphany—a humanist and materialist manifestation of the Nature of Man. Psychoanalysis, like religion, can console for life's greatest losses. Its inceptional case was based on Anna O.'s overcoming the trauma of her father's death, and Freud himself was enabled to write *The Interpretation of Dreams* by working through the loss of his own father. There is something comparable to the Christian art of dying in Freud's poignant, yet scientifically dispassionate, accounts of death and the guilt feelings of survivors.

At its highest point of revelation, in moments in some way analogous to Augustine's divine epiphany, psychoanalysis confers upon its subjects an anthropological epiphany. As a scientist and not a theologian, the analyst brings the patient face-to-face with his or her humanity. When the analysand acknowledges his Oedipus complex, he is witness to one of nature's laws in his life. Like the hero of Sophocles' play, the analysand is forced to confront nature: "Like Oedipus, we live in ignorance of these wishes, repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by *Nature*, and after their revelation we may all of us well seek to close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood" (4:297). Freud further naturalizes if not divinizes this moment of analytic epiphany when he declares that "there must be something which makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of destiny in the *Oedipus*" (4:296). This humanistic and natural transcendental moment of recognition is what distinguishes psychoanalysis most profoundly from Christian confession. Yet it is a recognition not

without certain affinities to religious experience, as Mark Edmundson has recently stated in a passage rich in other observations about the effects of reading Freud and becoming a Freudian subject:

This self-reading is often accompanied by the sensation of penetrating depths, but it may in fact be the action by which those supposed "depths" of the psyche are brought into being. This "penetration" and these "depths" assume a quasireligious aura when they are experienced in what one might call a "descendental" act. The moment is no less a religious one by virtue of the reversal in which we value demystifying "depths" rather than conventional transcendent heights. (30)

I will take the occasion of these references to Freud's reading of *Oedipus Rex* to return to the origins of psychoanalysis and a consideration of Freud's debt to literature. The literary history of confession will turn out to have contributed to Freud's founding case. Anna O.'s theatrical performance of hysteria and Freud's treatment of it would not be conceivable without the literary history of confession, with its eschatological dramas and neoclassical stagings. The critical position of psychoanalysis within my work will be similar to that described by Stephen Greenblatt in a recent essay on psychoanalysis and Renaissance culture: "Psychoanalytic interpretation seems to follow upon rather than to explain Renaissance texts. If psychoanalysis was, in effect, made possible by (among other things) the legal and literary proceedings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then its interpretive practice is not irrelevant to those proceedings, nor is it exactly an anachronism" (*Curse* 142).

By demonstrating in a few specific instances the debt of psychoanalysis to the literary and religious history of confession, I believe that we can fruitfully make use of a discourse that has always seemed so promising for literary studies yet has often been used to foreground entities of dubious interest: the psyche of the author or the reader, the psychopathology of characters, the Oedipal struggle of one text with its precursors, or the deconstruction of patriarchy by oppositional feminine voices within the text. Of these approaches, it is perhaps the last one that has the most merit in my eyes because, like the historical approach I intend to follow, it contests the scientific validity and objectivity of psychoanalysis and focuses attention on those passages in Freud that are the most open to a relativizing historicist critique.

THE OEDIPAL MOUSETRAP: FREUD AND
RENAISSANCE DRAMATURGY

As far as I know, Freud never commented on the works of Corneille or Racine or used them as a foil for psychoanalysis; so if we are to involve Freud in the "literary proceedings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," we must first look at the literary genealogy in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which begins with Virgil and Sophocles and culminates with a famous work written in 1600. As everyone knows, Freud uses *Hamlet* to demonstrate the universality of the most important assumption of psychoanalysis: the incestuous desire every human being experiences as a child for the parent of the opposite sex and the murderous impulses this first love inspires. Freud makes one of the strongest and most influential literary interpretations in history by proposing that both *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, separated by immense cultural and temporal distance, are the expression of an Oedipal conflict that every person experiences. The plays continue to move modern audiences because they represent a crime all men harbor in their hearts. Like Claudius and Gertrude, we are all caught in a timeless and universal Oedipal Mousetrap.

Freud's interpretation claims to undercut both *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*. His reading uncovers an anthropological, ahistoric truth that the poets were only dimly aware of and that has lain dormant for twenty-five centuries to be discovered and formulated in all of its scientific exactness by Sigmund Freud. However, Freud's originality vis-à-vis the text of Sophocles is not so great as it appears. Freud fails even to mention the one character (Tiresias) who insists, with all the dogmatism of an analyst, on Oedipus's guilt: "You yourself are the pollution of this country. . . . You, with both your eyes, are blind: / You can not see the wretchedness of your life" (18, 21). As Mark Edmundson has recently observed, "By eliminating the seer from his account, Freud removes the figure whose presence can provide some of the same insight into the play's action that he himself wishes to claim" (38). Freud strategically neglects the figure of analytic authority in the text in order to insist on his own originality. Thus psychoanalytic authority and originality at the expense of literature is less absolute than it seems. Psychoanalytic insights and positions are already there in the texts Freud interprets.

Edmundson even finds in Sophocles strong suggestions of another important contention of Freud's: that the desire of Oedipus represents

a universal human condition. It is my impression, however, that Freud borrowed as much if not more from *Hamlet* in the construction of his main thesis and that his very interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* was itself derived from the Renaissance dramaturgy present in *Hamlet*.

The idea that guilt resides in the spectator's conscience comes from the Mousetrap play. The idea that all men share the same kind of guilt is a variation on the Christian theme of Original Sin. Ubiquitous in *Hamlet*, this notion is nowhere to be found in *Oedipus*. The word *sin* appears in Freud's text when he evokes the different civilizations that produced the two plays: "Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the *sinner* whom he is to punish" (4:299, emphasis added).

The play shows how the reworking and restaging of a myth or fictive drama can be used to "catch the conscience of the King," an apt expression for the subjectivizing potential of drama. *Hamlet* also contains an allegory of Freud refashioning Sophocles to create his own myth. By altering the *Gonzago* revenge play, as Freud creatively interprets *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* itself, Hamlet gains cultural and analytical power over his adversaries, who immediately following the play are reduced to probing their own consciences and seem to have caught Hamlet's disease. In short, it is my belief that *Hamlet* was the real blueprint for the Oedipal theory and the "private theater" of psychoanalytic technique.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud compares the work of psychoanalysis to the movement of the plot in *Oedipus Rex*: "The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psycho-analysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius" (4:295). But if psychoanalysis is like a play, it is more like *Hamlet* than *Oedipus*, more like a Renaissance drama of individual consciences that turns guilt inward rather than a collective scapegoating that culminates in the *sparagmos* of the sacrificial victim. When Freud compares the cure to a play, and when Anna O. speaks of her private theater, they can both be talking only about *Hamlet*, a play written in the age when theater became private.

Same Soil, Changed Treatment

To examine these contentions further, let us begin with Freud's opening comments about the play: "*Hamlet* has its roots in the same soil as

Oedipus Rex. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind" (4:298). The "two widely separated epochs" are marked not only by a "secular advance of repression" but also by the arrival of Christianity. As the tension between Freud's "same soil" and "changed treatment" suggests, there are genealogical similarities and archaeological differences to be respected. To read *Hamlet* attentively is to be immediately aware that the play unfolds in a Christian atmosphere of universal guilt. All of the characters in the play are marked by this state of unhappy consciousness, to which Hamlet gives the most acute expression in his speech to Ophelia: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are errant knaves all; believe none of us" (3.1. 124–29).

To say of this state of affairs that civilization is marked by a secular advance of repression is to state only half of the truth: it is also characterized by a secular advance of confession. The play that inspires Freud's Oedipal theory is a tragedy of surveillance and confession, a new kind of tragedy in which Greek *anagnorisis* has been displaced by Christian *aveu*.⁵

"Confess yourself to heaven"

To convince oneself of this new insistence on confession, one has only to listen to the play's first sustained speech by the Ghost. The spirit of Hamlet's father comes from a world similar to Dante's *Purgatorio*. "Confined to fast in fires" until the guilt for his sins is "burnt and purged away," the Ghost could tell a tale "whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul" (1.5). As is the case with several of Dante's sinners, Hamlet's father must expiate sins that his sudden death deprived him the opportunity of confessing. He died "Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, / Unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled," (1.5), that is, denied the sacraments of communion, confession, and extreme unction. Thus the impetus for all of the play's action stems from the Ghost's first confession and admonition to his son.

The rest of the plot is marked by the main characters' attempts to make their adversaries confess. Hamlet is spied upon by Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern: "But with a crafty madness keeps aloof / When we would bring him on to some confession" (3.1); Hamlet exhorts

Gertrude, "Confess yourself to heaven" (3.4); Claudius is saved from being murdered when he attempts to "try what repentance can," and Hamlet postpones his revenge. *Hamlet* is thus a world where action is inhibited as much by confession as by, as Freud claims, repression. Consciences are acutely aware of possibilities for action but stymied by inward-turning attempts to understand their own motives and those of others before acting.

The Mousetrap

Hamlet manages to break out of the confessional network tightening around him. He understands that by altering a cultural spectacle, by adding a scene to the revenge play, he can unsettle the political and moral forces of Denmark. He outlines his dramaturgical principles in this speech:

... I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so to the soul that presently
 They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
 I'll tent him to the quick: If 'a do blench,
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
 May be a devil: and the devil hath power
 T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
 More relative than this: the play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

(2.2. 617-34)

This speech is really in an important sense the "germ cell of psychoanalysis." Hamlet assumes analytic power, a new secular position, which displaces both the religious power of the Ghost and the political power of the king. The spirit or the devil "hath power / T' assume a pleasing shape," but Hamlet, the new rational spirit, the Wittenberg-

educated Renaissance man, will pierce the courtly, imaginary world of contrived appearances, and "murder, though it have no tongue, will speak." A fictive creation, "something like the murder of my father," something like *Oedipus Rex*, will focus guilt in the conscience of a spectator and force the king to proclaim his malefactions.

Hamlet's words are illustrative not only of Freud's debt to the dramaturgy and the world outlook of the Renaissance but also of the potential of psychoanalysis to both found and dismantle "the Oedipal representation of things," to use Tambling's phrase. By this play, Hamlet breaks with the patriarchal past represented by his father's ghost and the king; he uses literature to find the real guilty parties at court and to liberate himself from the weight of the past. But Freud also used this passage, in conjunction with *Oedipus Rex*, to project a universal crime upon all mankind. Reading Freud *à rebours* with *Hamlet* reveals that consciences are fictive projections and that man is free, ultimately, by an act of mythopoesis to alter the master texts of conscience.

"ACHERONTO MOVEBO"

The Divine Comedy can also be studied for its adumbrations of psychoanalysis. I have included Dante's masterpiece in this study primarily because it echoes, structurally, the great watershed event in the history of confession, the Lateran decree of 1215. In the figure of Minos standing "horrible, snarling" ("orribilmente, e ringhia") at the gates of Hell and imposing confession on all who enter ("tutta si confessa"), Dante has created a myth of the specifically Christian discourse of confession and profoundly altered the Greek and Roman scene of the judgment of the dead.⁶ Homer and Virgil's Minos, revered king and lawgiver of the Underworld, has been turned into a vindictive demon. Like the medieval inquisitors, he uses confession and torture to mete out divine justice. The myth of Minos also links Dante to Racine, whose greatest heroine was "la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé" and whose conscience is burdened with the idea that "Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains."

There are also generic affinities between Dante and the great dramatists of the seventeenth century. On the dramatic aspect of the *Comedia*, G. H. Grandgent has written: "In dealing with the individual, the dramatic method is preferred. The author lets his characters reveal themselves by their own words and deeds. From the time of the ancient Greeks to the age of Shakespeare, no playwright equaled Dante in

dramatic feeling or dramatic skill. For this reason, the epithet 'Comedy,' applied by the writer to his poem, has for us an appropriateness unsuspected by the giver" (305).

Dante's explicit model for his spiritual odyssey is in fact book 6 of Virgil's vast epic. This section of the *Aeneid* recounts the *catabasis*, the descent into Hades, where Aeneas meets his fallen comrades and consults with the shade of his father. The *Comedia* is not an epic of national destiny, like the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, but rather a compilation of confessions. In *The Divine Comedy*, because of the universal obligation to confess, every human being's life is subjected to narrativization. All men and women, not just epic heroes, have a story worth telling. *The Divine Comedy* is a "drama of selfhood," to use Thomas M. Greene's suggestive formula.

The link with psychoanalysis is not as direct, but Freud's use of a line from the *Aeneid*—"Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronto movebo"—as an epigraph for *The Interpretation of Dreams* invites a comparative look at Dante. In a genealogical sense, Freud's Acheron, which he equates with the unconscious, shares certain crucial features with Dante's Underworld. If Freud's use of *Hamlet* implicates him in the literary proceedings of the seventeenth century, his reference to Virgil opens up another set of literary allusions that in the West runs through Dante. If Tiresias is the hidden figure of psychoanalytic authority in *Oedipus*, Dante's Minos is the implicit, unmentioned figure of analytic authority in Freud's Acheron.

"If I cannot bend the High Powers, I will move the Infernal Regions." These are Juno's words after failing to gain the gods' support for her vendetta against Aeneas. If her Olympian peers will not second her efforts, she will stir up Acheron against the Trojan hero. Freud used this line both as an epigraph for *The Interpretation of Dreams* and as a model of dream formation near the end of the same work. The dream-thought is like Juno; denied access to conscious mental life, it must move the Underworld, find expression in the compromise formations of dreams and symptoms.

Jean Starobinski has recently explored all the richness of this single line from Virgil to bring out Freud's use of the text as a model for the psyche. By using this line as an image of intrapsychic conflict, Freud went beyond the neurological and dynamic models of mental process prevalent in his day and invented a linguistic model of the mind. Virgil's *movebo* suggests both "physical movement and a dramatic plot" for Starobinski ("Acheronta" 286). The psyche is structured like a play because

its inner struggles do not function like the reflex arc but, rather, like the slow delaying tactics employed by Juno, which are *narrative* in nature. The unconscious evades censorship and expresses its desires by a continual plotting against the higher powers of consciousness.

The map of the mind that Freud developed thus owes more to textual analogies than it does to physics, as is stated in the *Studies on Hysteria*: "The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection" (2:160–61).

Starobinski begins his essay on Freud and Virgil by citing a letter from Freud to Wilhelm Fliess on the plot of *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

The whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. First comes the dark wood of the authorities (who cannot see the trees), where there is no clear view and it is easy to go astray. Then there is a cavernous defile through which I lead my readers—my specimen dream with its peculiarities, its detail, its indiscretions and its bad jokes—and then, all at once, the high ground and the open prospect and the question: "Which way do you want to go?" ("Acheronta" 273)

The literary critic notes the epic overtones of this passage ("The progress, in epic poetry, moves toward a discovery, the founding of a city, by means of difficult stages and combats"[273]) and then goes on to discuss the Virgilian intertext. But how can one not be struck by the parallel between Freud's "dark wood" where it is "easy to go astray" and Dante's *selva oscura*? The cavernous defile of the specimen dream corresponds to Dante's passage through Hell and Purgatory culminating in the equivalent of the specimen dream—his own confession at the end of the *Purgatorio*, which leads all at once to high ground, to mastery over self and the text. In the end, both Freud and Dante emerge as original authors confirmed in their poetic gifts after having risked their own subjectivity and included it in the matter of their work.

If, as Starobinski convincingly argues, the dream-thought behaves like Juno in moving Acheron, is not the psychoanalyst most like the figures who oversee the Underworld: Minos who sits in judgment, and

Dante who records the cases he sees for posterity? Perhaps we have in these two figures, Dante and Minos, two faces of analytic authority, the despotic classifier of deviance and the poetic creator of a new self, to which I will add a third and final possibility: Beatrice, to whom Dante confesses at the end of the *Purgatorio*.

THE VOICE OF BEATRICE

In a departure from church practices in his day, Dante confesses his transgression to a woman. Perhaps such liberating moments would have been more frequent in the pages that follow—and perhaps the Oedipal, patriarchal mold would have been shattered more often—if there were more gender reversals in confessional scenes like this in Western literature. Perhaps there is a maternal confessional scene that offers alternatives to the grip of Minos.

The confession of the pilgrim at the end of the *Purgatorio* is the culminating event of his spiritual and poetic journey. He too must undergo confession before crossing over into Paradise. It is during this confessional scene at the end of the *Purgatorio* that he sees Beatrice for the first time. The first word that the voice of Beatrice addresses to the poet is his own name, “Dante, because Virgil leaves thee, weep not, weep not yet” [Dante, perchè Virgilio se ne vada, / non pianger anco, non piangere ancora] (30.55–56). For the first time, the poet is actually called by the name of Dante and his precursor-guide leaves him. It is thus through this noncanonical confession that the poet claims a name for himself as author of the *Divine Comedy*. The Christian ritual of self-accusation gives access to a source of inspiration unknown to the pagan poets.

Dante is called by his proper name and not the repressive, castrating *nom du père*. Beatrice then admonishes Dante to look straight at her and likewise announces her own proper name: “I am, I am indeed Beatrice” [Ben son, ben son Beatrice] (30.73). The exchange of names that begins Dante’s confession is a promise of renewed hope. Dante’s name signifies his birth as an author, and Beatrice’s name shows the regenerative potential of the self from earthly beauty to heavenly glory.

But in his shame Dante cannot sustain her gaze and looks downward, where he catches sight of his reflection in a pool: “My eyes fell down to the clear fount, but, seeing myself in it, I drew them back” (30.76–77). From rapt identification with the mother to narcissistic self-contemplation in the fountain, the self seeks a refuge that comes only

when its imaginary, visual identifications give way to entry into the Symbolic order. Dante makes this painful entry into language with a barely audible yes: "Confusion and fear mingled together drove forth from my mouth a 'Yes' such that to hear it there was need of sight" (31.13–15). A yes that needed eyes to be read. The maternal gaze reads the lips of the son as he passes into language, intuiting a yes, not a no, a first lesson that there is a language of the self that heals and transfigures.

The pilgrim then makes his actual confession: "Weeping, I said: 'Present things with their false pleasure turned my steps as soon as your face was hid'" (31.34–36). After verbalizing his sin, he is washed in the river Lethe, which confers forgetfulness of past mistakes. Tears, the melting heart, and the cleansing, amnesic waters of Lethe signify a return to the maternal waters of birth.

The reader will recognize here Freudian and Lacanian themes of the progress of the ego from total identification with the mother, through narcissism, to the acquisition of a proper name. The maternal, poetic name, the barely audible yes, seems to offer creative, utopian alternatives to the *nom du père*.

IN THE GRIP OF MINOS, AT THE GATES OF PURGATORY

All the faithful of both sexes, after they have reached the age of discretion, must confess all their sins at least once a year to their own parish priest.

CANON 21, FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL, 1215

At the dawn of the thirteenth century, Scholastic theologians had reached a consensus that there were seven sacraments, among them confession. In 1215 Pope Innocent III, a former student of the Parisian schools where the theory of the sacraments had been elaborated, issued a decree making annual confession obligatory (he also declared that women and laymen could no longer hear confessions). The pope and his bishops, assembled at the Lateran Council, had decided that the sacraments, and confession in particular, were the best means to sanctify the population at large and preserve it from the dangers of heresy. Annual confession, it was thought, would rekindle religious fervor and at the same time allow the parish priest to assess the beliefs of his flock. At the yearly confession sins were forgiven, but the penitent was also sounded out about his beliefs. If the priest detected widespread heresy, the Inquisition, which Innocent also instituted, was summoned. When the tribunal arrived, heretics were given a grace period within which they could recant and confess; following this, denunciations and interrogations began. This meant that in the small, closely knit parishes of medieval Europe, a new obligation was placed on every man, woman, and child above the age of reason: he or she had to confess once a year or risk excommunication, social opprobrium, and suspicion of heresy.

One historian has called this development "the most important legislative act in the history of the Church" (Watkins 1:622). H. C. Lea, in his monumental study of auricular confession, claims that, by this means, the Church "secured the control of the minds of its subjects to

a degree which no other body has enjoyed" and that "the Europe of the Middle Ages and the faithful of Latin Christianity today are what the teaching of the confessional has made them" (2:414). These are large claims. Today, one might think that social justice, peace, and bioethics are areas where Church decisions are more momentous. An ancient decree about confession seems a remote issue in Church history and even more so in world history.

Furthermore, self-expression and self-analysis are so much a part of the air we breathe that we assume them to be instinctive. "Know thyself," "To thine own self be true," and "Get it off your chest" seem like the wisdom of the ages woven into the fabric of modern life. From the Delphic oracle to Shakespeare through Freud and beyond, the imperative to self-knowledge seems part of human destiny. Beliefs and civilizations may change, but we assume that man has always felt the need to discover the truth about himself and speak it to others. Such a self-fulfilling activity seems eminently compatible with democratic and humanistic institutions. We hardly suspect that our habits of self-analysis have a very particular history or that the search for personal truth could be a political engagement. How could the cultivation of the self be linked to power? And what possible link could exist between our broadest principles of psychological hygiene and an episode in the history of "sacerdotalism"?

Perhaps we need the imagination of a Georges Duby or a Michel Foucault to restage the Lateran decree as a crucial moment in the acquisition of these moral habits, which could be as consequential to history as more conventional political events: "Qu'on s' imagine combien dut paraître exorbitant, au début du XIII^e siècle, l'ordre donné à tous les chrétiens d'avoir à s'agenouiller une fois l'an au moins pour avouer, sans en omettre une seule, chacune de leurs fautes" (*Hist. Sex.* 1:81).¹ For Foucault, the habit of self-analysis and all the various modern institutions that employ confessional techniques—psychology, education, criminology, political autocritique, and even confessional literature—depend to some degree upon the universalization of the obligation to confess. What is now considered instinctive was first programmed into Western man by the Lateran decree.

Christian confession has specific features, and it is Foucault's contention that since Western man learned the language of confession from the Church, these features are still to be found in all its secular descendants. Our "Know thyself" is not the Delphic oracle's. By the vicissitudes of history, all of our modes of self-analysis pass through

the Christian experience. In an interview discussing *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault once stated that Freud's analytic techniques are essentially the same as those used by confessors and spiritual directors all the way back to patristic times. In the West when we confess, recline on the analyst's couch, or write autobiography we are repeating a gesture that runs "de Tertullien à Freud" ("Jeu" 77). Lateran marks the point at which confessional discourse became an obligation for all, and its influence can still be felt today.

For the theorist of "power/knowledge," such a phenomenon is just as decisive as any law or political decision; it could well be "the most important legislative act in the history of the Church." The Lateran decree is an example of a new and subtle form of power exercised for the first time on a massive scale, what Foucault calls pastoral power, the "government of individuals by their own verity" ("*Omnes*" 240). Unlike a conventional political act, the obligation to confess does not repress or limit any particular freedom, but its effects are all the more pervasive to the extent that it is not recognized as a law. The normal language of law is the restriction of freedoms—the peasant can't leave his land, the bourgeois can't bear arms—and the instance of enunciation of the truth is the sovereign body: the king or the pope declares that a tax must be paid or that a certain dogma is true. A law enjoining confession reverses this process; a subject is not restricted; on the contrary, he must express his or her inner thoughts and desires, and instead of accepting a truth, he produces a truth of which he is the sole guarantor.

In Western civilization, confession has become habitual, instinctive; speaking one's desires, it is assumed, is a liberating if not revolutionary activity. That is why the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s thought sexual and political revolution were on the same agenda: both were a matter of raising a repressed voice. Foucault's historical work on the origins of confession and analytical discourse calls for a reevaluation of such assumptions.

Of course, it would be imprudent to accept only one historical scheme from a notoriously iconoclastic thinker without examining it in detail and comparing it with other historians' work on confession. The history of confession has inspired a vast literature, and its authors are far from unanimity on the subject of the evolution of the sacrament.

Church historians tend to stress continuity when treating the subject and to deemphasize the Lateran decree: "Il [the Lateran decree] n'apporte aucun changement dans la discipline de l'Eglise . . . il n'offre

rien qui ne soit conforme à la discipline de l'Eglise, telle qu'elle s'était développée au cours des siècles par une évolution progressive" (Vacandard 893). For the orthodox historian, the sacraments were instituted by Christ, and the Church has merely worked out the implications of these divine foundations; nothing can change or deviate too far from the founding moment, and these moments can be found in the Bible. This position was clearly stated at the Council of Trent concerning penance: "Rien dans le régime actuel de la pénitence ecclésiastique n'est étranger à l'institution du Christ" (Vacandard 833).

But even the orthodox "continualist" must admit that Lateran was a watershed that inspired a "vaste travail de révision dont les canons et déclarations du concile de Trente seront le terme d'aboutissement normal, l'expression officielle et définitive" (Vacandard 894).

Protestant and republican historians like H. C. Lea and Michelet, anxious to dissociate their own ideologies from the abuses of the confessional, emphasize the Lateran decree as an aberrant departure that was corrected by the Reformation and the Enlightenment. For Lea, as for Foucault, Lateran is a radical departure, a coup d'état for sacerdotalism. But according to Lea, the confessional epoch is over in enlightened Protestant countries, which have abandoned the confessional, eliminated the priest as guardian of the conscience, and made man once again "directly related to God."

Michelet is also sure that auricular confession belongs to a barbaric Dark Ages. Commenting on the plight of a young priest trying to hear confessions in modern France, he observes:

Les manuels qu'on met entre les mains du jeune confesseur s'appuient sur les casuistes que Pascal a enterrés. Quand même l'immoralité de leurs solutions n'eût pas été démontrée, daignez donc vous rappeler qu'Escobar, Sanchez, posaient des questions pour une époque horriblement corrompue dont, grâce à Dieu, nous sommes loin. Leur casuistique à son origine s'adresse au mode écumeux, fangeux que laissèrent après elles les guerres de religion. Vous trouvez là tel crime qui peut-être ne fut jamais commis que par les affreux soldats du duc d'Albe, ou par les bandes sans patrie, sans loi, sans Dieu, que traînait Wallenstein, vraies Sodomes errantes dont l'ancienne eût eu horreur. (*Du Prêtre* 222)

Michelet's young confessor is supposedly out of touch morally with his clientele. His confessants are not the depraved creatures of the six-

teenth century, and their consciences have no need of his intervention. They have not committed the horrendous crimes listed in the priest's manual, or else they lead complicated lives of sexual and financial corruption which the priest's seminary education is incapable of deciphering. Foucault's thesis, however, is that the confessional tradition continued unabated into modern times, not only in the Church but in other institutions as well, where the behavior to be analyzed was no longer treated as "sin." Nonetheless, any number of psychological and sexual aberrations were subject to essentially the same confessional mechanisms. Even the extreme criminal material of Michelet's casuists was as contemporary as ever in the annals of nineteenth-century forensic medicine and psychiatry. And on the level of fantasy, is not Michelet himself catering to a reader who very well imagines the crimes and confessions of the "affreux soldats"? Literature is always ready to exploit a confessional vein, to overhear in fiction what was intended only for the priest's or the doctor's ear.

Further evidence for Foucault's thesis is present in the same work by Michelet cited above. Continuities between the corrupt sacerdotal system and modern institutions become apparent. Michelet still finds a need for confessional dialogue but thinks it should be restored to the family. The father must recover the power of the priest, he says, and obtain total confidentiality from his wife and children. The priest is everywhere denounced as a parody of the father, but this is only because confessional discourse should flow between the husband and his guilty wife: "Le mal avoué, connu, est plus près d'être guéri" (xxiv).

Troubling continuities between the sacerdotal confessional system and modern, enlightened society are evident in Lea as well. At the end of his study, when a few counterexamples are offered of societies with higher moral standards than Latin Christianity, there are disturbing parallels to the system previously denounced. A common feature of the ethically superior society is always a surveillance apparatus comparable to the Catholic confessional system. Lea mentions approvingly the police who maintain discipline in Britain; the cast system in Brahmanism, with its "close supervision over every act"; and the Society of Friends, characterized by a "watchfulness exercised over its members" (2:432).

The difference, then, between Foucault, on the one hand, and Lea and Michelet, on the other, is that although he agrees with them that the Lateran decree inaugurated a new chapter in the development of Western consciousness, he sees that epoch as still continuing.

Confessional discourse wears various secular disguises in our Enlightenment institutions.

Other modern historians, less polemically engaged for or against confession, have drawn other lessons from its study than the abuses of sacerdotalism or the unfolding of a divine plan. They too point to the Lateran decree as significant:

It was not the first legal act to require confession to the priest and it can in no sense be said to have invented the necessity of confession. Nevertheless it was momentous; and even if it was originally designed as a disciplinary canon to allow pastors to know their parishioners and watch for heresy, its effects were in fact broader. For the requirement of yearly confession now had the authority of Pope and council, who had prescribed powerful religious sanctions to back it up. (22)

For Thomas Tentler, whose opinion is here cited, obligatory annual confession is important because it increased the power of the clergy, who used confession to regularize sexual conduct. Their aim was to stabilize the institution of marriage, insure the legitimacy of offspring, and assure legal property transfer. Tentler assigns the Church a major role in shaping the institutions of medieval society. In addition to its role of social engineer, the Church also provided a sense of hope and relief; for Tentler the effect of confession was to "discipline and console." So there is a dimension to confession other than power, and the Lateran phenomena must be understood as a response to a real need of the population—the need to be reassured about salvation. The repetition of absolution fulfilled this need.

Tentler is an authority in the field, and few scholars can fault his findings, but debate remains whether the Church was initiating social policy through the confessional or merely following in the wake of wider social change. For example, one critic suggests, "*L'Eglise est la garante d'un ordre social avant d'en être l'inspiratrice*" (Lemaître 143). A broader study of the confessor's manuals and lists of sins which Tentler used in his work can lead to the conclusion that the Church was merely enforcing the collectivist morality of feudalism rather than embarking on its own program of mastery of the individual conscience. The importance of particular sins varied from place to place. In some localities, confession seemed to focus more on issues of violence and respect for property than on sexual behavior, suggesting that

the Church was still concerned with the ills of feudal society rather than with cultivating a new private, urban ethic of chastity.

This debate leads in two directions, one a simple matter of chronology: at what point did confession start to focus on sexuality and inculcate a more private morality? Tentler and his followers in the *Groupe de la Bussière* say it was between the thirteenth and early fifteenth century, culminating in the work of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), who wrote the *summa* of the new morality.² John Bossy, however, sees this development as coming later; he characterizes medieval confession as focusing on sins against the social order and argues that it wasn't until the sixteenth century that confession became an instrument of interior discipline for the *individual* as opposed to the earlier objective of collective behavior. This question could be a matter of the penetration of the new morality to the level of widespread practice. The adversaries in this debate agree upon the terms, private versus collective morality, the post-Lateran phenomena of the interest in sexuality and the complication of sins. It is a question of periodization: when does the Church become more preoccupied with sexuality than violence and other threats to the fabric of feudal society? There is no absolute chronological answer to this question, and the reply one offers will always be influenced by the milieu that is being analyzed. The upper echelons of society were first to be influenced by the new, more private morality. It encountered more resistance from the rural population than from the urban elite.

The other, wider question raised here is the role of religion in general and confession in particular in the evolution of society. Is confession merely an expression of the prevailing ideology, or can it take the lead in defining a new morality, and can that morality be anything but coercive?

In response to these kinds of questions, some historians are willing to extend even further Tentler's limited approval of confession. No longer simply "discipline and consolation," penance is defined by one as a "sacrament de la liberté" (Sot 20). This historian's frame of reference is strictly the actual sacrament of confession, but he does raise an issue with which Foucault's theory must contend, and that is whether a discourse like confession allows for any freedom of the subject.

Foucault implies that anything a subject does or says ensnares him or her in a power structure. Doubtless he is right to demystify the pseudo-freedom of many forms of confession and analysis, but is confessional discourse from beginning to end necessarily caught up in a

conspiratorial web of power? It can be argued that ideology does not have that firm a grip on human expression. Fredric Jameson, for example, has criticized the excessively pessimistic and systematic outlook of Foucault and proposed the dual principle of "ideology and Utopia" for analyzing social practices and cultural productions: "Even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian" (*Political* 291). He opposes Foucault's one-dimensional vision of societies as predatory networks of opportunistic power structures that recuperate and manipulate all forms of subjectivity. Instead, he emphasizes the contradictory nature of cultural forms, which never simply confirm prevailing ideology but instead draw it backward and forward toward the "affirmation of collective solidarity." He sees religious forms not simply as the instruments of class domination but as forces expressing genuine liberating and utopian aspirations.³

I will retain Foucault's notion of "pastoral power" in my analysis but remain open to the utopian possibilities of confessional discourse. The development of confession marks an expansion of human consciousness; it carries with it the threat of the tyranny of conscience, but it also allows man to gain some mastery over evil. The perspective of redemption appears, of a second chance, of a verbal repetition and working through of transgression. On the collective level, we see the utopian ideal of a society of permanent truth, where the transparency of consciences allows the group to function with one mind. Even in the most oppressive uses of confession, curious reversals occur: scaffold confessions arouse the sympathy of the crowd, the scapegoat becomes a hero. Repeated confessions of the flesh teach the laity a new language of passion as penance gives way to pleasure. Finally, in our own day, the spread of psychoanalysis has had several unforeseen consequences, with their utopian and ideological aspects: sex becomes a commodity and Freud's "perversions" are skillfully marketed in a consumer society. The language of psychoanalysis is taken up by various excluded groups to combat their sexual marginalization, and Freud himself becomes the object of a vigorous critique. Foucault does point out some of these reversals, but his analysis dwells upon the negative examples; he tends to see *any* use of confessional discourse as implying power and entrapment. I would seek to go beyond this perspective. Can't the words of the self be utopian or revolutionary? Doesn't the dreamworker ultimately defeat the analyst?

THE ORIGINS OF CONFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

To appreciate the singularity of the Lateran decree, it will first be necessary to trace briefly the history of confession. The key changes that emerge are the shifting of emphasis from a sacrament of penance to a sacrament of confession; the imposition of a single, coherent definition of confession based on the Scholastic notions of matter and form and the *ex opere operato* definition of the sacraments; the development of a more subjective form of religion founded on contrition and inferiority; and the extension of power by the Church to the domain of the individual conscience and the use of this disciplinary power to combat heresy and control sexual morality. After discussing the historical evolution of confession, we will then examine our first literary example of confessional discourse: Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

From Penance to Confession

With the imposition of the Lateran decree, a sacrament of *penance*—chiefly fasting and other ascetic works of atonement—was replaced by a sacrament of *confession*. As a modern theologian explains it; “The shame of the avowal becomes the expiation of what is confessed” (Rahner, “Penance” 397). The theologians whose opinions were to prevail on the subject of confession had decided that the *words* of the priest and the confessant were the essential part of the sacrament. In Scholastic terms, the sacramental sign consisted of the acts of the penitent (his sins, his contrition, and his words) as the *matter* of the sacrament, while the absolution formula pronounced by the priest was the *form*. Together the two elements formed a sacrament that functioned *ex opere operato*, “by the work done.” Under a kind of speech act theory, it was held that the sacrament itself conferred forgiveness, and not the sinner’s contrition alone. The actual words, “Ego te absolvo,” were not declaratory on the part of the priest but judicial or performative, having operative power in themselves.

Expressive Signs: “Propter Meritum Erubescitiae”

From a political point of view, the Scholastic definitions emphasized the importance of the priest, but they also made the words of the penitent more important. St. Bonaventure says that confession must be spoken out loud because this increases the shame: “Tenentur proprio ore

dicere propter meritum erubescantiae" (qtd. in Vacandard 920). According to St. Thomas Aquinas, each sacrament uses expressive symbols to signify what it accomplishes, and since the essence of confession is to submit sin to the judgment of God, the human voice is both the appropriate means and symbol for self-inculpation. Thus in order to express outwardly the nature of the sacrament, confession should be "full of shame."

Secundem quod est pars sacramenti, habet determinatum actum, sicut et alia sacramenta habent determinatam materiam. Et sicut in baptismo ad significandam interiorem ablutionem assumitur illud elementum cuius est maximus usus in abluendo, ita in actu sacramentali ad manifestandum ordinate assumitur ille actus quo maxime consuevimus manifestare, scilicet per proprium verbum. (Suppl. q. 9, a. 3)

In so far as it is part of a sacrament, it [confession] has a determinate act, just as the other sacraments have a determinate matter. And as in Baptism, in order to signify the inward washing, we employ that element which is chiefly used in washing, so in the sacramental act which is intended for manifestation we generally make use of that act which is most commonly employed for the purpose of manifestation, viz. our own words.

Est autem confessio actus virtutis poenitentiae. Quae quidem primo initium sumit in horrore turpitudinis peccati. Et quantum ad hoc, confessio debet esse verecunda: ut scilicet non se jactet de peccatis propter aliquam saeculi vanitatem admixtam.

(Suppl. q. 9, a. 4)

Now confession is an act of the virtue of penance. First of all it takes its origin in the horror which one conceives for the shamefulfulness of sin, and in this respect confession should be full of shame, so as not to be a boastful account of one's sins, by reason of some worldly vanity accompanying it.

The *sigillum*, or seal of secrecy, is another aspect of confession that Thomas saw as signifying the sacrament's inner reality: "God hides the sins of those who submit to Him by Penance; wherefore this also should be signified in the sacrament of Penance, and consequently the

sacrament demands that the confession should remain hidden" (Suppl. q. 11, a. 1). Like a seal stamped on a letter, the confessional *sigillum* is an engraved mark that signifies an absence, an effacement.

Extended further, the idea of *sigillum* suggests that a confession always conceals as much as it reveals and, more generally, that signs have about them a seal-like quality that allows one message to be read while another is hidden or repressed. Pursuing further and generalizing Aquinas's idea of the *sigillum*, one could arrive at a very modern theory of the sign reminiscent of Heidegger's etymological meditation on the truth as *aletheia*, which is both "unconcealment," the "opening which first grants Being and thinking and their presencing to and for each other" (68), and concealment: "*Lethe* belongs to *a-lethe*, not just as an addition, not as shadow to light, but rather as the heart of *aletheia*" (71). If *sigillum* belongs to confession, not just as an aftereffect or an act of professional discretion but as a hiding and an unknowing that are integral to the act of revelation itself, then perhaps the normal impediments to confession (guilt, shame, forgetfulness) are secondary to an intrinsic, formal difficulty. Confession will never be complete: not on account of moral shortcomings, but because the signs by which it is proffered always conceal other signs.

Within a metaphysics and a theology of presence lies a kind of signifying that "hides sins from the face of the living God" [occultatio peccatorum ab oculis Dei viventis] (Quodlib. q. 12, a. 18). It is consistent with metaphysics that this negative kind of signifying, this dark side of the sign, be confined to writing and that the voice be privileged as the instrument of God's grace and the sinner's sacramental act (we recall St. Augustine's commentary on Lazarus). However, the idea that every revelation is an occultation is also suggested by the movement from *voce* to *sigillum*. Speech reveals not only the inner nature of the sacrament but also, as *sigillum* effaces sin from the soul and hides the spiritual transformation, the return to life and Being effected by confession.

The Scholastic definitions were adopted as the official positions of the Church during the Council of Trent, and it was held that this sort of verbal confession had been instituted by Christ and had always been a part of tradition. As we look back to the origins of confession in early Christianity, we will see that a far different sort of penance existed.

To situate the Christian practice of penance correctly, it is necessary to invoke the precedent of the Old Testament. Admission of one's sinfulness to God is a fundamental experience in the Judeo-Christian

tradition. Exhortations to confess can be found throughout the Old Testament. From the Psalms comes this typical passage:

I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
And mine iniquity did I not hide:
I said, I will confess my transgression unto Jehovah;
And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

(Ps. 32.3-5)

The sinner feels that he has violated a personal bond with a God who takes an interest in his life, and that the way to make amends for his transgression is to admit his guilt. The point is not that one reveals a fault to an omniscient Being who knows it already, but that the admission of guilt is operative in obtaining forgiveness. The other important aspect of this confession is that it is made directly from the sinner's heart to God; there are no human intermediaries.

In the New Testament, there are instances of confession to other men. The Epistle of St. James commands: "Confess therefore your sins one to another." John the Baptist's penitents were "baptized of him in the Jordan confessing their sins" (Matt. 3.6), although it is not clear that there was auricular confession here. The Church interpreted Christ's granting of the "power of the keys" as a commission to hear confessions and loose or bind men to their sins. But even Catholic apologists do not maintain that there are clear-cut references to auricular confession in these passages: "*Aucun passage des écrits apostoliques n'affirme avec certitude l'existence et la pratique de la confession auriculaire au temps des apôtres*" (Mangenot 838). The same uncertainty prevails during the first three centuries of Christianity. There was a rite of penance, but its essence was not auricular confession.

Public Penance

In the beginning, Christianity was a total lifelong engagement, a single definitive conversion like the experience St. Augustine describes. The practicing Christian in the earlier days had no need of a sacramental confession. As Vacandard notes, "*Saint Augustin ne s'était vraisemblablement jamais confessé de sa vie*" (892). One either tried to live up to the Christian ideal, or one left the community. To commit a grave sin such as adultery or murder was to quit the fellowship. At most, the early Christian was given *one* chance to rejoin the community. In the

words of St. Ambrose (A.D. 340–97): “Sicut unum baptisma, ita una paenitentia” (Vacandard 860). The first reference to a repeatable penance occurs in St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 340–407).

Public penance was reserved for three grave sins—murder, adultery, and idolatry—that would be notorious enough to make auricular confession unnecessary. But this consideration does not suffice to explain the essential difference between this form of penance and the auricular confession of Lateran. Although we find during this period a few scattered references to people revealing their sins in private to a spiritual counselor before the ceremony, it was only for exceptional circumstances: an adulteress might be allowed to do private penance for fear that public knowledge of her sin would lead to her death; a man might reveal his sin to a bishop to ask whether it was grave enough to merit public penance. Verbalization was only an incidental part of this rite; its essence was the doing of penance, *agere paenitentiam*.

The technical name for this early penance was *exomologesis*. The first detailed description comes from Tertullian’s (A.D. 160–220) *De paenitentia*. He speaks of the need for the sinner to manifest his sin externally: “So that it may not be only borne upon the conscience within, but may be also exhibited by some outward act. This act, which finds better and more frequent expression under its Greek name, is *exomologesis*, by which we confess our sin to the Lord, not because He knoweth it not, but inasmuch as by confession satisfaction is ordered” (qtd. in Watkins 1:115). Confession is made within the heart to God, and in order for *exomologesis* to be complete, the sin must be manifested outwardly by the body through a long period of public penance. Tertullian explains that one must “exchange the sins which [one] has committed for severe treatment” (qtd. in Watkins 1:115). The period of severe treatment was prolonged from several months to years, depending on the case. At the end of this period the sinner was brought into the church and allowed to rejoin the community. Again Tertullian provides us with a description of such a scene: “And you, introducing the penitent adulterer into the church to entreat the brotherhood, prostrate him in the midst all in hair-cloth and ashes, arrayed in disorder and repulsiveness, before the widows, before the presbyters, laying hold of the garments of all, licking the footprints of all, clasping the knees of all” (qtd. in Watkins 1:124). It was only at the conclusion of this ceremony that primitive penance was complete. The long ascetic manifestation of the body of the sinner is what accomplished forgiveness. Foucault comments that behind this experience is the model of martyrdom, of

union with God through loss of life and renunciation of the self. The penitent was dramatizing his state of sin and his desire to "get rid of his own body, to destroy his own flesh, and get access to a new spiritual life. . . . In the ostentatious gestures of maceration, self-revelation is at the same time self-destruction" ("About the Beginnings" 214-15). In Christian confession, one is obliged by divine injunction to simultaneously reveal and renounce the self.

Other philosophical schools have practices that resemble Christian confession and asceticism, but they aim at mastery over the forces of mind and body, which are considered fundamentally natural and good, not their systematic elimination and replacement by a divine principle. There is a unique note of alienation of the body and the mind by sin in the Christian tradition, and there is a unique solution to the problem: the *obligation* of the Christian to analyze and dramatize his sinful condition.

Sozomene, one of the Fathers of the Church, says that *exomologesis* is like confessing one's sins *tamquam in theatro* (qtd. in Vacandard 859). It is a public acting out of sin before the assembly of believers. Like the theater in ancient Greece, this ritual served as a social contract for the community. It drew the primitive Church together around the representation of certain sacred realities. The ideological and utopian possibilities of this dramatization are several: it can be a joyous rite of inclusion or a ritual of exclusion separating the individual from the community. It can manifest a uniquely Christian concern for the individual, expressed in the parable of the Good Shepherd leaving his flock to look for the one lost sheep, or it can produce a similarly unique culpabilization of the single scapegoat.

The rite of public penance has taken both forms through the centuries. It has been an occasion for collective renewal and forgiveness; the celebration of the carnival is founded upon public penance. But it has also produced ugly rites of exclusion like the auto-da-fé and the show trial.⁴

Repeatable Private Penance and Monastic *Exagoreusis*

The practice of more frequent confession did not become widespread until monastic congregations spread their confessional practices to society at large. This happened in the East during the eighth and ninth centuries and in the West, with the generalization of Celtic monastic penance, as early as the sixth century. The word *penance* is still the key

notion to these practices because, although it could now be undergone more than once in a lifetime and involved the private revelation to a priest of secret sins, the emphasis was still on the *work* of penance to be performed to expiate sins. Penance remains an infrequent practice at this period and has yet to assume any canonical regularity. The literature of the period shows us saints still confessing their sins directly to God; men confess to other men when in need, or even to their horses or their sword (Beriou 77). Pilgrimages, almsgiving, and entry into a monastery are considered more significant ways of atoning for sin than confession.

Repeatable private penance was an adjustment of the old system to new social realities. The Christian populace was growing, and moral standards were necessarily lowered to accommodate a larger population that was not as fervent as the first Christian communities; allowances had to be made for people who repeatedly fell into serious sin. The anonymity of sin in a larger group also made auricular confession necessary.

This period is referred to technically as the stage of "tariffed" penance because it produced the first penitentials, books that established an exact penance for each type of sin. The classification of sins and a sort of penitential economy are starting to emerge at this period. It would be interesting to study the relation of this economy to that of feudalism. One can sense the ideological and utopian aspects of this system; it was "communist" to the extent that all penitential "laborers" had equal access to a divine means of production, but its ideological function was to postpone the just rewards of labor to the next life while leaving the social order intact. Chaucer's pardoner is an example of an entrepreneur willing to translate the system into an actually functioning economy. He is a sort of protomercantilist who plies his trade between Rome and Canterbury.

Compared to later developments, this regime of penance seems to take an excessively quantitative, mechanical attitude to sin with little attention paid to the subjective aspect and the interior disposition of the confessant.

But alongside this kind of rare, severe penance for the population at large, there was a tradition originating in the Eastern Church of a more sophisticated monastic spiritual direction, the *exagoreusis ton logismoi* or "manifestation of thoughts" to a spiritual director. The technique involved a more rigorous search for sin in its mental, unconscious origins. The novice revealed his thoughts, not just his sins, to

an experienced elder gifted in the "diacritical" science of discerning thoughts. The aim was to render the soul entirely lucid to itself and to extirpate evil inclinations in their unconscious roots.

Reading Evagrius or Cassian, one enters a completely different spiritual world from that of the early Christian communities. Instead of the social ritual of *exomologesis*, we find the solitary battle of a monk against his evil thoughts. In this spiritual arena, the community is no longer threatened by adultery or violence; rather, a man striving for perfection is assailed by demons who send him tempting thoughts and illusions. They are legion. Although invisible, they can be detected by the truly gifted: St. Anthony can actually smell their presence; Evagrius warns that the demon of fornication lives by water; Cassian tells stories of the most virtuous ascetics laid low by false demonic visions, one monk's temptations even culminating in "Judaism and circumcision" (*Collationes* 2:8). Each demon wages an incessant war against the monk by sending him wicked thoughts, *logismoi*. Those who lead lives in the world are tempted by physical objects, whereas the monk is called upon to fight a more difficult, psychological battle, the "immaterial war" (*kata dianoian*) against evil (Evagrius 610). The spiritual analysis of thought was the chief resource of the holy man in this battle.

There were several principles at work in monastic analysis. One assumption was that the devil worked best in secret. He could inspire a wicked thought, but if the thought were revealed and brought out in the open, he would be defeated. The novice monk never knew whether a thought was inspired by God or by the devil; the most objectively meritorious idea, such as undertaking a long fast, could hide a secondary, wicked intention like personal vanity. The way to get to the root of the thought was to expose it to a spiritual director.

According to Cassian, who describes monastic analysis in his *Collationes* and *Institutiones*, the verbalization of a thought would reveal whether it arose secretly from God, the self, or the devil. Confession thus had moral as well as epistemological merit; it delivered the soul from the secret suggestions of the devil, and it clarified the subject's thought process to himself. A passage from Cassian dramatically illustrates the power of confession to free the sinner from Satan's grasp and reveal the truth. A young monk, Serapio, has stolen a loaf of bread because he can no longer endure a fast. The following day his spiritual director, Theonas, delivers a homily on the importance of honesty. Serapio removes the loaf from under his cloak and confesses his sin; immediately, "a burning lamp burst from his chest and filled the room

with the smell of sulfur." The elder explains: "The Lord has made visible the truth of my words; He wanted you to see with your own eyes how the devil, who suggested the sin to you, was thrown out of your heart by your salutary confession, and how, once discovered, will have no hold over you any longer" (qtd. in Guy 30).

The actual words of the confession are the center of the story. Neither the petty crime of stealing the bread nor the revelation of the crime to the community is important; what counts is the interior drama of hiding a sin and then revealing it. God produces the miracle to dramatize for the monk his moral state and the merit of confession; the actual words of confession vanquish Satan and produce a miraculous revelation of self-knowledge. The text also shows the importance of confessing to an authority; it is not enough that the monk feels contrition in his heart. The elder interprets the meaning of the confession and miracle. One assumes that the symbols of the burning lamp and the sulfur were clear enough, but this is a relatively easy, straightforward case. God does not always intervene so dramatically to show the demon at work.

The monastic texts mention several hermeneutic principles involved in the interpretation of confessions. One is an attention to the physical manifestations that accompany the avowal: "The Fathers say it is the universal and evident sign that a thought is from the devil when we blush in admitting it to our spiritual director" (Cassian, *Institutions* 49).

Cassian discusses at length methods for deciding whether a thought is from God, the devil, or the self. Certain analogies are used for the process of discerning thoughts. The novice and his spiritual director stand watch as "sentinels" over the doors of consciousness, preventing any untoward thought from entering. In the *Collationes* he makes three comparisons of interest: a miller who selects only certain grains to be ground, a centurion inspecting his troops, and a money changer who rejects some coins and accepts others.

The fundamental principles of the Fathers' science (*gnostike*) of discernment (Gk. *diacrisis*, Lat. *discretio*) are quite similar to psychoanalysis if one replaces the demonic terminology with Freud's scientific language and familial mythology. Like the analyst, the spiritual father pays attention to the material and structural aspects of thoughts to decipher their unconscious meaning. The devil possesses an art, a *techne*, by which he disguises his temptations, much as the dreamwork disguises repressed desires. Therefore, the mental signifier must be scrutinized in all its aspects to uncover its true meaning. Evagrius goes

straight to the object represented to look for clues: the face of someone who has injured our pride is the sure sign that a hidden devil is trying to produce a movement of anger. For Cassian, in a curious reversal of the Freudian associative pathway, an image of the mother is the demon's way of leading the mind on to libidinous thoughts of other women.

The comparison between the spiritual analyst and the money changer is perhaps the most suggestive; it is one of Freud's models of the censorship process, although what Freud's preconscious does and what the spiritual director does are opposites. Freudian censorship only allows the successfully disguised wish to pass through to consciousness, whereas Cassian's money changer pierces the disguise and sends the evil thought away (Foucault, "About the Beginnings").

The money changer image is also the most complex image of the discernment of thoughts. The thoughts of the confessing monk are treated like coins, which, unlike the miller's grain and the passing soldiers, are symbolic objects. A complete poetics of thought interpretation emerges in Cassian's prolonged discussion of this comparison. Again we are struck by the attention to the material aspects of the signifier: Is the coin-thought made of gold, that is, is it authentically Christian or is it contaminated by pagan ideas? Does the coin bear the image of the True King or the tyrant? Even the true image might be a counterfeit; in other words, an overtly pious thought or inspiration might conceal a sinful ulterior motive like vanity. The apparently true effigy is also compared to the temptation of false biblical readings: the devil misleads the monk in his reading of the Bible and this is the source of sinful acts.

Cassian thus paints a thoroughly modern picture of the insistence of the unconscious in mental life. Dreams, he believed, were the avenue of the unconscious; they revealed secret vices that the monk had not yet eradicated from his soul (*Institutions* 275). Choices of action, reading, even the most altruistic behavior can all be done to satisfy unconscious desires.

The analytic activity of the money changer also reveals a linguistic model of the psyche. Consciousness and the unconscious are levels of meaning to be deciphered in a constant poetic war between the spiritual father and the demon. One image from Cassian is particularly striking in this regard. He concludes his discussion of *discretio* by saying that hidden in the corner of the soul are the tracks or traces of demonic beasts, "bestia, vel leo vel draco, pertransiens pernicioosa ves-

tigia latenter impresserit" (*Conférences* 106). These vestiges show the way to other "beasts"; evil has left its mark in the unconscious, and these pathways are waiting there to be reactivated. *Discretio* is the art of perceiving and eradicating these evil traces and substituting a sacred writing in its place. With the "plow of the Scriptures" (*evangelico arato*), the monk traces a new message into his soul. This linguistic model of the psyche is remarkably similar to one of Freud's models, precisely the one that is now considered the most sophisticated and that has kept Freud at the center of postmodernist thought.⁵

There are other obvious parallels between psychoanalysis and monastic direction. The intervention of the spiritual director is much like that of the analyst; both are intuitive, yet both also involve certain hermeneutic principles. Furthermore, the monks had already developed a somatic theory like Freud's "drives." For them, human behavior was dominated by eight unconscious inclinations or *logismoi*, which sprang from two hidden somatic drives: gluttony and libido. These two forces in turn were aspects of *philautia*, a self-love akin to Freud's primitive narcissism (Hausherr 1028). The Desert Fathers theorized the instinctual foundations of mental life long before Freud; the psychotextual territory was already there, psychoanalysis merely changed the place names.

Both practices rely on a mysterious heart-to-heart insight into the unconscious of the other. The Freudian analyst, like his monastic predecessor, must suspend his rational faculties, cease note-taking, and "bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the emerging unconscious of the patient" (12:115). Likewise, the elder relied upon an "illiterate" (*aggramatoi*) gift of discernment to read the thoughts of his monks (Hausherr 1026). There was a science to his methods, as we have seen, but ultimately he relied upon an infused perspicaciousness. His own rational faculties were supported by a spirit within him. Barsanulphe, one of the Fathers, explains how spiritual direction works: "Saints do not speak on their own authority, it is God who speaks in them as He will, sometimes in veiled fashion, sometimes clearly" (Hausherr 1049). The only proper preparation for either science is a long apprenticeship that teaches the adept how to read the perverse rhetoric of the mind. The spiritual authors make a distinction between the enlightened reading of the Bible and the interpretation of thoughts; the most gifted confessor could be an *idiot* in this regard (Hausherr 1026).

Freud led his subjects along a verbal pathway to the recognition of

their Oedipus complexes; the monks wandered a literal and figural desert in search of the Father. In the words of Ignatius of Antioch, this journey was guided by an inner voice: *Deuro pros ton Patera*, which the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* translates as: "Viens ça, vers le Père" (Haus-herr 1012). In the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the monastic vocation is confirmed by the joyous acclamation of the name of the Father; the monk cries out in recognition to his abbot: "Accepistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamamus: Abba, Pater!" (chap. 2). The inadvertent Lacanian language of the *Dictionnaire* helps us cast the genealogy of psychoanalysis back to patristic times. From the Desert Fathers to Lacan, there has always existed this paradoxical Father who solicits the voice of the unconscious and promises to restore meaning to the subject: "Viens ça, vers le Père."

Awareness of this continuity between analysis and confession will give rise to a more relative, historic use of psychoanalytic terms. By constantly provoking a confessional echo to the rhetoric of analysis, I hope to gain insight into another sort of paternity and power that Freud's method was blind to methodologically because it never escaped this kind of monastic fatherhood. Beyond the provisional role of transferential father, the analyst permanently plays the role of the Desert Father who breaks through repression and enjoins speech. The name of this father is not synonymous with negation. If I may be allowed a Lacanism myself, a homophonic pun that sounds like Nietzsche's "Ja-schaffende," the analytic father does not temporarily occupy the place of the "nom(n) du père" but rather exercises an unrelinquished paternity by a "oui-dire du père."⁶

Phonetically, the word suggests a discursive order and a power that are the opposite of the "non," and, as the dictionary definition suggests, "ce qu'on ne connaît que pour l'avoir entendu dire"—the only truth available in analysis is a heard truth. And finally, *hearsay* and *rumor* are opposed to juridically verifiable evidence. Paternal power is normally associated with the law, all desire coming up against the paternal law, and the paternal act par excellence consisting of the enunciation of the repressive law. But this "oui-dire" or rumor of the father operates differently from this kind of law. Psychoanalysis and spiritual direction both deal with unverifiable evidence. At the core of the dream material lie primal scenes that may or may not be literally true, and in the depths of the monastic soul are true and false messages from God, the self, or demons. Only God himself can see the soul in its entirety. Both the analyst and the confessor receive a hearsay mes-

sage that passes through them; the rumor is never verified, just repeated. The name of the father is invoked, but it is not synonymous with repression. The name and the law of the pastoral father is not silence, but speech. A final quote from one of the Desert Fathers explains how confession is essential to maintaining spiritual paternity in the monastic community: "Nothing is more important than the combat of confession [*exagoreusin agonisma*] and the heroic exploits of obedience: by these two exercises the soul is enlightened, and the will is mortified; by these two means are obtained the perfect unity of the spiritual child [*gegennemenou*] with the spiritual father [*gegennekota*]" (Migne, PG 99.812). The "agon" of confession is essential to holding the monastic community together; it forms the discursive bond between spiritual father and son. This is a paternal regime, and there is still an essential link between desire and paternal power, but this power is not juridical in nature; it is not a prohibitive law but rather a positive call to an "agon" of self-statement. War is the absence of law; it calls for rapid adjustments to a changing dynamic situation and the exploitation of the enemy's force. The monks' battle for control of the soul is an active process in which desire is forced to speak, not be silent. The monk's desire is engaged, encountered, not simply suppressed. This war of self-statement is a unique Christian feature that must be taken into account in any phenomenology of power in the West. Power is not just the negative law of the father; it is also this verbal call to arms of desire which founds the analytic cohort of fathers and sons.

Did Freud know anything of his monastic precursors? The father of psychoanalysis insisted that his practice was different from confession: "In confession the sinner tells what he knows, in analysis the neurotic has to tell more" (20:189). But we have seen that many of Freud's techniques were already in use in monastic confession. One wonders whether ignorance or deliberate deception on Freud's part could explain this omission. Certainly Pierre Janet, one of Freud's mentors and the coinventor of the talking cure, was aware of the precedent of spiritual direction.⁷

In comparing monastic *exagoreusis* to public penance, several parallels and divergences are apparent. The goal of both practices is the same—the simultaneous revelation of man's sinfulness and self-renunciation, the *abneget semetipsum* of asceticism. Public penance accomplished this through the symbolic destruction of the body; monastic confession achieved similar results by a total surrender of the

thought process to a spiritual director. One was an exceptional process for reconciling grave sinners to the community, the other a technique for exercising continuous control over a committed member. With the imposition of the Lateran decree, private confession became the sacramental rite of penance, but the other form persisted for some special circumstances—public sinners and, most notably, the hapless victims of the Inquisition, who were subjected to a sort of theater of the sinful body which hearkens back to *exomologesis*.

The general tendency was toward the monastic type of confession. Lateran was the first step in generalizing a monastic, *psychological* type of religion that responded to and, to some extent, helped create the modern individual. From Lateran onward, confession became more frequent and progressed logically toward spiritual direction, a process that would reach its full development in the seventeenth century with the popularization of spiritual direction.

DANTE: "TUTTA SI CONFESSA"

We will now consider a literary text based on the same discursive principles as the Lateran decree. *The Divine Comedy* uses obligatory confession to create a total vision of humanity governed and punished by its own verity. As the lost souls enter Dante's Inferno, they must pass before the Judge of the Underworld, Minos, and confess their sins:

Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia:
 essamina le colpe nell'entrata;
 giudica e manda secondo ch'avvinghia.
 Dico che quando l'anima mal nata
 li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;
 e quel conoscitor delle peccata
 vede qual luogo d'inferno è da essa;
 cignesi con la coda tante volte
 quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.

(5.4–12)

There stands Minos, horrible, snarling, examines their offenses at the entrance, judges and dispatches them according as he girds himself; I mean that when the ill-born soul comes before him, it confesses all; and that discernor of sins sees what is the place for

it in Hell and encircles himself with his tail as many times as the grades he will have it sent down.

It is not enough that the souls are justly condemned according to God's justice, they must enact their damnation in their own words. Their confessions are the basis of their punishment; Minos translates their guilty words into a degree of corporal punishment by encircling himself a certain number of times with his tail. He initiates the punitive mechanism of Hell, which consists in turning the condemned into cruel illustrations of their sins. Their bodies become an ironic, vengeful representation of their confessions.

The *Purgatorio* is also founded on confession, if we are to believe the Dante scholar Edward Moore, who says, "It can hardly be doubted that the white marble [of the first step of the Gates of Purgatory] represents candid *Confession*; the dark and calcined stone cracked in all directions, broken-hearted *Contrition*; and the flaming red porphyry, burning *Love*" (47). The first step one takes in either of Dante's vast penitentiaries involves avowal; the confessing subject is either in the grip of Minos or at the gates of Purgatory.⁸

The very architecture of Hell and Purgatory is like the deployment of a medieval confession manual. The various *cornices* and *boglia* of Hell and Purgatory are based on the Schoolmen's classification of sin into Seven Deadly Sins, plus certain notions borrowed from Aristotle and Cicero (Moore 152–208). Furthermore, the successive confessions of the sinners are an essential narrative device of Dante's work, the bulk of which is devoted to recording the confessing subjects he encounters.⁹ On another level, the confession of the pilgrim himself at the end of the *Purgatorio* is the culminating event of his own spiritual journey; he too must confess before entering Paradise.

In conceiving his vast confessional empires, Dante combined elements of the classical mythological Underworld with different confessional practices of the Church. Different methods were appropriate to different spheres, from the crudest, most external forms of confession to establish objective guilt to the more refined forms of mental purgation.

In Purgatory, the penitents are afforded the benefits of canonical penance, involving contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction. Having availed themselves of the sacrament of penance in life, symbolized by the white marble gates of Purgatory, the redeemed sinners

can begin the process of eradicating the "memoria del peccato" and preparing their minds for God (*Purg.* 28.128). They lead a quasi-monastic life: celibate, ascetic, immersed in the liturgy, and freely confessing their sins. Witness the lustful souls of the seventh circle, who joyfully call out their sins before entering the purifying flames:

sopragridar ciascuna s'affatica:
la nova gente: "Soddoma e Gomorra";
e l'altra: "Nella vacca entra Pasife,
perchè 'l torello a sua lussuria corra."

(26.39-42)

Each of them strives which shall the loudest cry. "Sodom and Gomorrah" the new-comers shout. The rest, "Pasiphaë enters the cow that the bull may run to her lust."

The atmosphere is one of a medieval pilgrimage or an Ash Wednesday procession. We know that Dante was familiar with the liturgical manuals governing penance and pilgrimages. Meersseman maintains that the presentation of confession in the *Purgatory* was directly inspired by such literature.¹⁰

In Hell, by contrast, confession leads only to classification of sin and punishment. The redeemed souls in *Purgatory* are saved by Christian mercy, whereas the *lex talionis* of Jehovah and the *contrapasso* of St. Thomas Aquinas fall vengefully upon the naked souls of the damned. "If Thou shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?" (Ps. 129).¹¹

The damned are in some respects like the victims of the nascent Inquisition, and some of them, like Farinata, were actually condemned by the Holy Office. Having refused the grace period of life and the opportunity of canonical penance, they are subject to the "question" and forced to confess. The public punishment of their sin hearkens back to *exomologesis*, but it is a vindictive parody of public penance. It is not the meritorious asceticism of the contrite body but rather the ignominious humiliation of a recalcitrant flesh that, *malgré lui*, will be made to signify the reality of sin.

Dante's didactic intent was certainly to show the ease and generosity of confession within the Church as opposed to the terrible justice that awaited the unrepentant. Dante's work is an expression of the Lateran age in that it treats confession as a necessary antidote to sin, but

one that still meets with great resistance. Many of the souls in the *Inferno* are there because they postponed confession for too long, and the *Purgatorio* abounds in stories of in extremis confessions that save the sinner from damnation.

MINOS

When one compares Dante's Minos with that of his Greek and Latin sources, the radical difference between the Christian and pagan view of the afterlife becomes apparent. The unique role of confession in the Christian scheme of divine justice and punishment is also evident. Let us briefly review the myth.

Minos was the son of Zeus and Europa and unfaithful husband to Pasiphaë, whose own union with the sacred bull of Poseidon produced the Minotaur. In revenge for his son's murder at the hands of the Athenians, Minos imposed a cruel annual tribute on their city. Seven young men and women were fed to the Minotaur, whom he had imprisoned in the depths of the Labyrinth at Knossos. The hero Theseus, incarnation of Athenian law and reason, traveled to Crete and destroyed the Minotaur, thus ending the religious and political oppression of Mycenaean Athens by the rival and alien Minoan Crete.¹²

However barbarously he may have treated the Athenians, Minos was revered by Homer, whose hero Odysseus evokes his memory in the nineteenth book of the *Odyssey*: "Here lived King Minos whom great Zeus received every ninth month in private council—Minos, the father of my father, Deucalion." Odysseus also encounters the legendary king in the Underworld: "There then I saw Minos, the glorious son of Zeus, golden scepter in hand, giving judgment to the dead from his seat, while they sat and stood about the king through the wide-gated house of Hades, and asked of him judgment" (bk. 11). Because of his reputation for justice on earth, Zeus made him judge of the Underworld. In the Homeric legend, we are still far removed from Dante or even Plato: "Homer says that Minos gives laws to the dead but does not act as judge" (Ringgren 206). There are a few great transgressors in Homer's Underworld—Tantalos, Sisyphos, and Tityus—who are punished for exceptional crimes against the gods, but there is no idea of an individual judgment awaiting all mankind followed by reward or punishment for the deeds of earthly life. Homer's *nekyia* describes a shadowy mournful existence where the dead regret their lives on earth.¹³

It was the Orphics and the Pythagoreans who moralized the myth and installed Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aikos as judges of all souls entering the afterlife, sending them to the Isles of the Blessed or Tartaros. This is the version we find at the end of the *Gorgias*, with the added stipulation that the judges of the Underworld must use their own souls to pass judgment on the dead: "And the judge must be naked too and dead, scanning with his soul itself the souls of all immediately after death" (523e).

Virgil's *Aeneid* describes a similar, although less mystical, judgment scene in which "Minos sits on judgment with a jury / chosen by lot and bids the silent gathering / Listen to evidence of their lives and the charges / Preferred against them" ("*quaesitor Minos urnam movet, ille silentum / consiliumque vocat vitasque et crimina discit*") (6.432–33). Virgil uses the vocabulary of the Roman court to describe Minos; he is a *quaesitor* convening a *concilium*.¹⁴ His function is confined to hearing the cases of souls unjustly condemned to death, and no mention is made of confession. If there is a source for Dante's "tutta confessa" in Virgil, it would be the description of Rhadamanthus, who, at the gates of the iron tower of Tartaros (*ferrea turris*), interrogates the wicked:

Gnosius haec Rhadamanthus habet durissima regna,
castigatque auditque dolos subigitque fateri,
quae quis apud superos, furto laetatus inani,
distulit in seram commissa piacula mortem.

(6.566–69)

Rhadamanthus of Knossos rules this place
With an iron hand: hearing each case of deceit
And fitly condemning it he compels each victim
To confess to the gods those crimes whose expiation
They had postponed in life—in their fatuous self-
congratulation at having concealed them—and death
came too late.

Dante has radically altered these images of the just judges of antiquity. First, he has combined the roles of Minos and Rhadamanthus. Second, in typical medieval fashion he has transformed a quasi-divine character from pagan mythology into a demon, complete with the tail of a snake.

The confession that Dante's Minos extorts is not the same as that which Rhadamanthus demands. Virgil's "fateri" has none of the sacramental connotations of "confessa." Virgil's judge is a Roman *quaesitor*, whereas Dante's is a "conoscitor delle peccata."¹⁵ In Virgil's Avernus, as in the Rome of his day, confession is not a universal moral obligation but an exceptional juridical procedure reserved for certain deceitful criminals.

More important, Virgil is not really interested in the avowals that Rhadamanthus hears; his hero, Aeneas, does not record a single conversation with Rhadamanthus's clients. In Dante's Hell and Purgatory, on the other hand, every single soul must confess. It is a decisive act of the greatest spiritual significance, *in malo* for the damned and *in bono* for the saved. It is the focus of Dante's whole poem; for the first time in Western literature, every single human being has a story that demands narration.

The pagan gods do not insist on man's confession. There is a steady increase in moral obligations to truth and justice as we move from the Homeric world to Plato, but nowhere can one find the ritual obligation to tell the truth about oneself. The *oracle* is the ritual by which pagan gods and men communicate; the *god* speaks the enigmatic truth about man. In Christianity, the verbalization of the truth must come from the individual, in this life or in the terrible encounter with Minos.

A look at the iconography of Minos through the ages confirms the different interpretations he was subject to. Figure 1 is a restored fresco of the priest-king of Knossos, whom Sir Arthur Evans identifies with the legends of Minos: "Here we recognize Minos himself in one of his earthly incarnations" (779). This is presumably as authentic a representation of the Cretan Minos as we possess. His crown is inscribed with the symbols of "the Snake Goddess of the Delta" and the "Minoan sacred flower" (776).

Recent scholarship, however, has challenged Evans's reconstruction and interpretation of the priest-king fresco. In *The Chalice and the Blade*, Riane Eisler describes Minoan Crete as a "prepatriarchal civilization," and notes the preponderance of female imagery in its art: "At the great palace of Knossos it is a woman—the Goddess, her high priestess, or perhaps, as Hawkes believes, the Cretan queen—who stands at the center while two approaching processions of men bear tribute to her" (31). Citing the work of the anthropologist Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Eisler contests Evans's interpretation of the fresco: "It is modern archaeologists who have dubbed the young man just described the



Figure 1. Priest-king from Knossos, identified by Sir Arthur Evans as Minos. Reprinted with permission of Art Resource, New York.

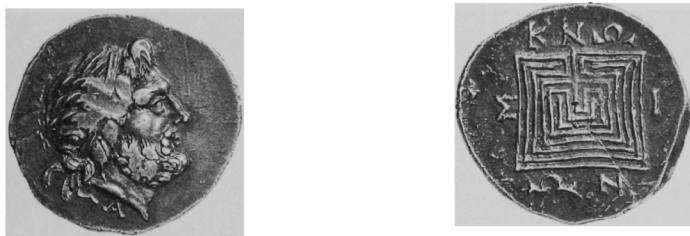


Figure 2. Silver tetradrachm from Knossos, c. 200 B.C., depicting Minos; reverse shows square labyrinth. Reprinted with permission of the British Museum.

‘young prince’ or the ‘priest-king,’ when in fact, no single representation of a king or a dominant male god has yet been found” (37). In some sense, then, Evans’s *The Palace of Minos* prolongs later Mycenaean myths about Crete. The Victorian archaeologist was looking through male, European eyes when he saw Minos in the frescoes of Crete.¹⁶

This study is concerned only with the Greek legend of Minos and its Christian reinterpretations, but it is enlightening to know that one of the distortions of the Greek myth is the suppression of a matriarchal civilization. According to Eisler, “Minoan Crete was the last, and most technologically advanced, society in which male dominance was *not* the norm” (39). Perhaps this explains why the Theseus legend portrays Minoan sexuality as bestial and depraved. The myth encodes an anxiety of matriarchy, the repression of maternal Crete by patriarchal Athens.

Figure 2 shows the idealized lawgiver imagined by the mainland Greeks many centuries later. All authentic Cretan elements have disappeared, and we see a bearded Hellenistic ruler. This representation is in conformity with the dignity of Homer’s and Virgil’s Minos. Figures 3 and 4, a fifteenth-century illumination and Doré’s nineteenth-century illustration, represent Dante’s demon of confession preying upon the souls of the damned. Figuring prominently is the tail that Minos wraps around himself, the precise number of times corresponding to the circle where the condemned soul will be hurled. This is the one detail that clearly demonizes Dante’s figure.¹⁷

Much critical ink has been spilled over the meaning of this tail.¹⁸ In search of a source, Luciani discusses a case of serpent divination in the *Odyssey* and a passage from Servius’s commentary on the *Aeneid* in which a snake forms seven coils with its body to indicate that



Figure 3. Inferno 5.4–8, Ferrare illuminated manuscript, detail, 1474. Reprinted with permission of the Biblioteca Vaticana.

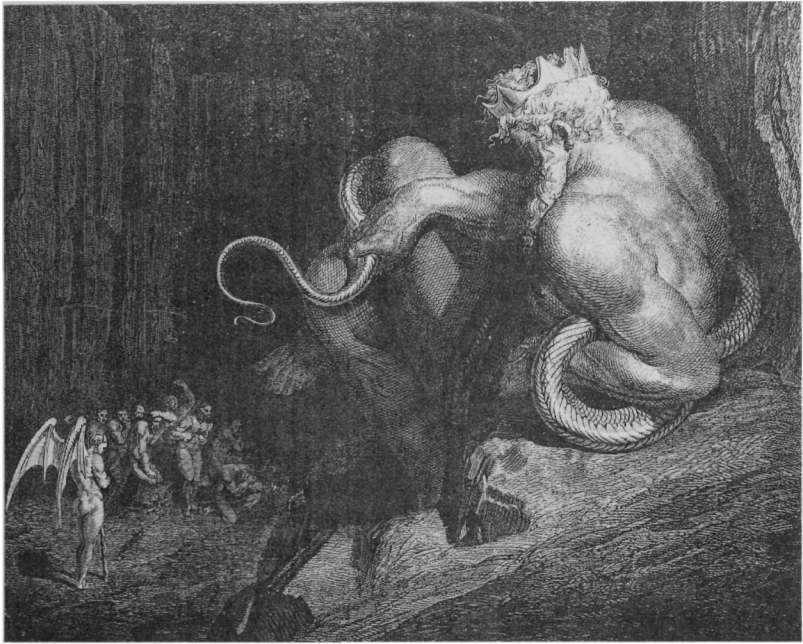


Figure 4. Gustave Doré's Minos, 1861. From Dante Alighieri, *L'Enfer* avec les dessins de Gustave Doré. Paris: Hachette, 1861.

Aeneas is about to begin his voyage to Averno (50). Perhaps Dante remembered the story of Laocoön when he created this image of constriction and fatality, or he could have been influenced by Virgil's Tisiphone, who pounces on Rhadamanthus's subjects as soon as they have been judged, brandishing in her left hand a "tangle of snakes."¹⁹

Above all, the tail must be seen as a bestial sign of perdition, like the "bestial segno" alluded to in *Inferno* 32.133. On that occasion, the pilgrim is appalled to see Ugolino gnawing on the head of Ruggieri, and he calls out to him: "O tu che mostri per sì bestial segno / odio sovra colui che tu ti mangi" [O thou who by so bestial a sign showest thy hatred against him thou eatest]. Ugolino silently chewing on the head of Ruggieri is a bestial parody of normal communication. Instead of proffering speech, the mouth consumes human flesh. All communication in Hell gravitates toward this regression to the bestial.

This is in keeping with Dante's linguistic doctrine expounded in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. There he contends that speech is the distinguishing characteristic of man: "Only to man was it granted to speak" (49).

Human beings communicate by signs that are at the same time "rational" and "sensible":

Oportuit ergo genus humanum ad comunicandas inter se conceptiones suas aliquod rationale signum et sensuale habere: quia, cum de ratione accipere habeat et in rationem portare, rationale esse oportuit, cumque de una ratione in aliam nihil deferri possit nisi per medium sensuale, sensuale esse oportuit. Quare, si tantum rationale esset, pertransire non posset; si tantum sensuale, nec a ratione accipere nec in rationem deponere potuisset. (46)

Hence for communicating its thoughts mankind had to have some rational and sensible sign: for it had to be rational, since it must receive from reason and transmit to reason; and it had to be sensible, since nothing can be transmitted from the reason of one to the reason of another except by a sensible medium. Hence if it were only rational, it could not pass between them; if only sensible, it could not receive from reason nor deposit in reason.

The purely sensible sign is how animals communicate; Minos's tail is such a sign of the beast.

In *Inferno* 27.124–27, Dante adds a picturesque detail that underscores the role of the tail as beastly sign. Minos has just heard the confession of Guido da Montefeltro, and as he renders his sentence he bites his own tail: "A Minòs mi portò; e quelli attorse / otto volte la coda al dosso duro; / e poi che per gran rabbia la si morse, / disse: 'Questi è de' rei del foco furo'" [He carried me to Minos, who coiled his tail eight times about his rough back and after biting it in great rage said: "This is one of the wicked for the thievish fire"]. Even when Minos does speak, he inexplicably bites his own tail as though he could not escape a compulsive and bestial rage, as though his speech, like Ugolino's, had to be embedded in a bestial sign. The "sign" of Ugolino can also be read as a parody of the Eucharist. He chews on the head "as bread is devoured for hunger" (*Inf.* 32.127), a grisly literalization of the Sacrament, the "Bread of angels."²⁰

A similar sacramental irony is intended in Minos's bestial tail. Confession is being parodied; instead of the healing words of forgiveness and the power to release from sin which Jesus commissioned the Apostles to do through confession (Matt. 16.19, 18.18), we have only the silent, menacing binding of the tail. As we imagine the scene, the

sinner tells his or her story while Minos's tail slowly inscribes on his own body the descending spiral of *catabasis*, the narrative of descent to the Underworld.

INFERNO: "PAROLE E SANGUE"

Confession and punishment are closely related in both the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. As we have observed, entry into either realm is predicated upon confession, and once inside, enforced verbalization plays a key role in the punishment of the condemned and the reformation of the contrite. All the inhabitants of Hell must relate their crimes to the two poets on command. As Vanni Fucci makes clear, "Io non posso negar quel che tu chiedi" [I may not refuse to answer thy question] (24.136). In addition, the manner of confession has special significance for the sin and its punishment. What is said of Cavalcante, that he was recognizable by his voice and his mode of penance, "Le sue parole e 'l modo della pena" (10.64), is true of all the sinners. In fact, the voice and the mode of punishment are one. Voice is, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, the "*determinata materia ad significandam*" of confession (Suppl. q. 9, a. 3) and, as we have seen, of particular significance for Dante. Thus each confessant has a particular speech impediment or inflection of voice that signifies his or her crime and its punishment.

At almost every station of the pilgrim's journey through Hell, a similar protocol is observed: Dante asks of his guide, "Who are they?" or "What was his or her crime?" ("Maestro, chi son quelle / genti che l'aura nera sì gastiga?" [5.50]; "Chi è colui, maestro?" [19.31]). To which Virgil usually replies that the condemned souls must explain their crimes in their own words: "da lui saprai di sè e de' suoi torti" (19.36). Dante frequently describes in great detail the *prise de parole* of the sinners, and their speech is always marked by a particular difficulty related to their crime. Their entry into the Symbolic causes literal mutilation and castration; their confessions are "parole e sangue" ("words and blood"). Let us consider some of the more striking cases.

Paolo and Francesca's tale must be told quickly during a moment's respite from the infernal wind that blows the Lustful about, and although it affords them some peace, the telling of the tale cannot be separated from its punishment. Francesca's speech is at the same time a weeping and a saying: "dirò come colui che piange e dice" (5.126), and it causes Paolo to suffer in exactly the same way: "Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse, / l'altro piangea" (5.139-40). Nevertheless,

their confession is a moving, noble form of suffering compared to that of the souls in the lower circles.

The Wrathful, for example, are submerged in slime, and their sighs cause the surface of the water to bubble: "*Sotto l'acqua ha gente che sospira, / e fanno pullular quest'acqua al summo*" (7.118-19). Their confession, which they sing collectively as a "hymn," must pass through the water: "*Quest' inno si gorgoglian nella strozza, / chè dir nol posson con parola integra*" [This hymn they gurgle in their throat, for they cannot get the words out plainly] (7.125-26).

The formal aspects of the voice are particularly important in Piero della Vigne's confession. His voice speaks plaintively from the branches of the tree that imprisons his soul:

Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
dall'un de' capi, che dall'altro geme
e cigola per vento che va via,
sì della scheggia rotta usciva insieme
parole e sangue; . . .

(13.40-44)

As a green brand that is burning at one end drips from the other and hisses with the escaping wind, so from the broken splinter came forth words and blood together.

Here is perhaps the clearest illustration of a confession that is itself a specific form of punishment related to a sin. "Words and blood" issue from the broken branch like the hissing sound of gas escaping from a burning stick. Because through suicide Piero showed no respect for his body, his soul has been humiliated by being cast into a tree. His spirit is now at the mercy of a baser form of body. He has lost control of his bodily functions, chief among them speech. When Dante breaks the branch, Piero's voice and blood escape uncontrollably to punish him for the deliberate taking of his own life. Significantly, he is unable to stop his speech, "*non posso tacere*" (13.56).

The uncanny atmosphere of the barren wood and the bizarre, pitiful confession of the "*spirito incarcerato*" have a haunting, dreamlike quality about them that evokes the mystery of suicide and the tragedy of della Vigne's career. His imprisonment in a tree is such a powerful, expressive condensation of so many aspects of his life. It is related to his very name, "*Vigne*," as though in the unconscious, in the Under-

world, his name had become a thing.²¹ We know that della Vigne was "of humble origins" (Sinclair 177), and this rustic sounding name seems to predestine him, however high a state he achieved in life, to a catastrophic fall from power. Anthony Cassell has observed that such wordplay appealed to the medieval mind, and, in fact, Vigne's name had already been subjected to imaginative puns.²²

The imagery of the mournful voices in the branches and the idea of a man's spirit imprisoned in a tree seem to revive primitive, animistic beliefs about the mobility of human life within nature. Perhaps Freud was right that there is such a thing as the death wish, *Thanatos*, and that it would be fitting for Dante's suicide victim to inhabit a tree, since he was ultimately moved by a desire to return to the vegetative if not the inorganic state.²³

Confession has a specific signification in the case of Vanni Fucci as well. He was known as a brute and a brigand, but in life he managed to hide an even more serious sin by letting another man be hanged for a crime he committed, the robbery of a sacristy. Thus he must endure the shame of owning up to this sin for the first time:

'Più mi duol che tu m' hai colto
 nella miseria dove tu mi vedi,
 che quando fui dell'altra vita tolto.
 Io non posso negar quel che tu chiedi:
 in giù son messo tanto perch' io fui
 ladro alla sagrestia de' belli arredi,
 e falsamente già fu apposto altrui.

(24.133-39)

I suffer more that thou hast caught me in the misery in which thou seest me than when I was taken from the other life. I may not refuse to answer thy question. I am put down so far because I was a thief in the Sacristy of the Fair Ornaments and then it was laid falsely on another.

Fucci is further punished, or at least forced to accomplish the opposite of what he passed his life doing, by prophesying—telling the truth about the future of Florence.

Confession is directly parodied in the circle of the Simonists, where Dante, "like the friar confessing one fixt in the earth for treacherous homicide," listens to the confession of a pope who is stuck upside

down into a baptismal font. This scene is emblematic of all confessions in the *Inferno*. It is an ironic reversal of canonical penance; it brings no relief but rather mocks the sinner and intensifies his punishment. Here the sinners are thrust into the earth; their speech is reduced, literally, to dirt.

ANALYSIS WITH A VENGEANCE

Everywhere in Hell one is struck by the vengeful materiality of the punishments. The sinners are unable to rise above the Real to the Symbolic; instead, the very words of their confessions are dragged down into materiality and subjected to a perverse sort of analysis. Each sin appears as a corporeal hieroglyph imposed by divine justice and deciphered by Dante and his guide, Virgil. Like hysterical or catatonic symptoms, these mute bodily signs are made to "join in the conversation" of the sinners' confessions. But the scenes of confession and analysis in the *Inferno* are deliberate failures of the cure. Minos uses the sinners' words merely to decide in which circle they belong, and the poet-confessor's interventions cannot alleviate the suffering of the lost. The symptoms can be understood, as they are to varying degrees by the condemned themselves, but no one can relieve repression or unbind desire from its destructive fixations.

Freud himself used the metaphor of the Underworld to refer to the unconscious and primary process, quoting a line from Virgil, "If I cannot bend the Higher Powers, I will move the Infernal Regions," to describe how the dream state is the kingdom of repressed desires and primary process, which are otherwise unable to breach consciousness (5:608).

Such a comparison could be of assistance in understanding the means of representation employed in the *Inferno*. There, the condemned express the most primitive, brutal desires of mankind; their psychic energy is "unbound" as it flows unimpeded toward its immediate expression, employing the rhetoric of the unconscious to arrive at its ends: displacement, condensation, and overdetermination. But simultaneously, their desires are subject to a terrible censorship process; the very means of expression of their impulses turns against them. The words and gestures at the disposition of the damned assure that their desires will always be reduced to a brutish immediacy and that they will never be able to understand the nature of their wants or sublimate their needs.

Censorship is really the wrong word to describe the punitive mechanism of Hell because the process is set in motion by Minos's extorted confessions, and it continues in the dialogues between Dante and the sinners. Hell is being forced to state one's desires in a hostile code subject to an abusive hermeneutic authority, to be imprisoned in primary process with only Minos for an analyst.

The rhetoric of punishment in Purgatory is, to pursue the analogy, closer to secondary, conscious figuration. In distinction to the damned, the penitents have access to the signification of their symptoms. They can *read* traced upon their foreheads the seven Ps, corresponding to the Seven Deadly Sins, which are progressively effaced as the soul purges its guilt (9.112).

There is a long association in the Judeo-Christian tradition between sins as unconscious, guilty writing and forgiveness as effacement: "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Jehovah" (Jer. 17.13). Christ writes in the sand to disperse the crowd that has gathered to stone the adulteress (John 8.4-10). St. Augustine says that, as a result of Christ's death on the cross, "the handwriting which was contrary to us was blotted out" (*Confessions* 113). St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) comments on a line from Psalm 50: "'And blot out all my iniquities,' to make the pardon a lasting, permanent one, for he that turns his face away from a piece of writing, may look on it again and consider the matter of it, but when the writing is destroyed, 'blotted out,' it can no longer be read, a proof that when sin is forgiven it is thoroughly forgiven" (158).

John Freccero has studied the ironic use of writing which characterizes punishment in the *Inferno*. Calling it "mimesis with a vengeance," he draws a convincing parallel between Dante's uses of writing and that theorized by St. Augustine in the *De genesi ad litteram*. For Augustine, there were three kinds of vision: the corporeal, the spiritual, and the intellectual:

Corporeal vision was vision in the ordinary sense through the organs of the body. By spiritual vision, Augustine meant imaginative vision, whether stimulated directly by the senses or indirectly by writing, memory, or dreams. Finally, intellectual vision was of the highest order, bringing total understanding with it. . . . The vision represented in the *Inferno* is clearly corporeal; the souls of sinners are to be seen and even touched by the pilgrim.

Augustine's prime example of "corporeal vision" is the story of the handwriting on the wall which King Nebuchadnezzar could see corporeally but was unable to read spiritually. The prophecy of his own doom was inscribed in all its materiality on the walls of his palace, but he could only perceive it as a thing, an icon, not a sign. For Freccero, this same type of material, ironic signification is the basis for all representation in Hell, starting with the gates, whose inscription calls attention to itself as a thing, and continuing with the bodies of the damned, which are vengeful material reductions of the soul. There is a deliberate frustration of spiritual signification.

For me, this process is especially visible in the speech of the damned, where what is most distinctively human and promises the greatest liberation is deliberately and cruelly reified. The *contrapasso* attacks what for Dante is most human in man, his speech, and reduces it to guilty materiality.

To return to our study of the expressivity of confessions in the *Inferno*, we take up the case of Ulysses. His narration starts out according to the same principles as the ones cited above. From within the flame he shares with Diomed, he is compelled to speak. Dante notes how the infernal flames that imprison Ulysses are stirred up and burst forth in epic discourse:

Lo maggior corno della fiamma antica
cominciò a crollarsi mormorando
pur come quella cui vento affatica;
indi la cima que e là menando,
come fosse la lingua che parlasse,
gittò voce de fuori, e disse: "Quando
mi diparti' da Circe, . . . "

(26.85-91)

The greater horn of the ancient flame began to toss and murmur just as if it were beaten by the wind, then, waving the point to and fro as if it were the tongue that spoke, it flung forth a voice and said: "When I parted from Circe, . . . "

This, along with the tale of Paolo and Francesca, is perhaps the most ambiguous of the confessions in the *Inferno* because the crime supposedly being expiated—false counsel and seductive speech—is actually reenacted by Ulysses' stirring tale of his final voyage in search of

knowledge and experience. Like his companions, who were beguiled by his words and sought to transgress the ordinary limits of human knowledge and civic obligations, we can't resist the sway of Ulysses' words: "Li miei compagni fec'io sì aguti, / con questa orazion picciola, al cammino" [My companions I made so eager for the road with these brief words] (26.121-22).

Even in Hell, confession can produce a stirring narrative; the aesthetic provides momentary relief from the torment of enforced self-statement. Like Camus's Sisyphus rolling the rock up the hill, some infernal confessants seem to gain a measure of meaning and dignity by their avowals. Their poetic discourse offers a respite from desire and torture. One is reminded of Schopenhauer's idea that only art delivers man from the infernal cycle of desire and torture: "This is the painless condition that Epicurus praised as the highest good and the condition of the gods; for a moment we are delivered from the vile urgency of the will; we celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of volitions; the wheel of Ixion stands still!" (qtd. in Nietzsche 105).

No such ambiguity concerns the confessions of three sinners from the deepest circles of Hell: Bertran de Born, Nimrod, and Brutus. The mutilated, inarticulate, and, in the last case, silent manner of their avowals can but produce horror.

Bertran is among the "seminator di scandalo" (28.35) whose insinuating words have torn apart medieval society's most sacred bonds: religion (Mahomet), the political order (Piero da Medicina, and Mosca dei Lamberti), and, worst of all, that between father and son (Bertran himself). Because they have threatened the organic unity of society, a unity expressed in the king's body or the Mystical Body of Christ, their own bodies are horribly mutilated. Bertran has been decapitated; in order to make his confession he must lift up his head to bring his words to Dante, "per appressarne le parole sue" (28.129). The manner of his confession dramatically signifies his crime. For having incited Prince Henry of England to the Oedipal crime, Bertran is beheaded instead of being blinded. The *contrappasso* severs his vocal cords and topples his mouth from its position of authority above the body, as though, for Dante, the Oedipal crime was a sin against speech rather than an offense against reason and vision.

As the pilgrim makes his way to the pit of Hell, he encounters Nimrod the giant, one of the "sons of the earth" ("figli della terra") (31.121), who serve as Lucifer's bodyguards. He speaks to Dante and Virgil in totally meaningless sounds: "Raphèl mai amècche zabi almi" (31.67).

According to legend, it was Nimrod who tempted men to build the Tower of Babel, and hence he is responsible for the confusion of languages sent by God as a punishment. In Hell he is reduced to an imbecile incapable of understanding any languages and whose own speech means nothing. It is pure material signifier, an inert message which might tempt the most skillful psychoanalyst to unravel it, but which for Dante and Virgil signifies merely that Nimrod is plunged into a prediscursive, infantile state of stupidity.

Only Brutus is more bereft of humanity, deprived absolutely of speech as he suffers: "vedi come si storce e non fa motto" [See how he writhes and utters not a word] (34.66).

PURGATORIO: "I BUON SOSPIRI"

One of the first souls the pilgrim encounters in the Ante-Purgatory is Manfred, son of the emperor Frederick, who was killed in the battle of Benevento. He is as mutilated as any of the lost souls of the *Inferno*, with his eyebrow cleft in two, but the manner of his speech immediately reveals that he lives under a different regime of self-revelation: "sorridendo disse: 'Io son Manfredi, . . . '" [smiling he spoke: "I am Manfred"] (3.112). He narrates the story of his life, which is not without its grave sins, with a smile because he avoided damnation *de justesse* with a last-minute act of repentance.

Such is also the case of Belacqua, whose story likewise produces a smile, this time that of the poet: "Li atti suoi pigri e le corte parole / mosson le labbra mie un poco a riso" [His lazy movements and curt speech moved my lips a little to a smile] (4.121-22). Belacqua suffers from the sin of sloth, but he also escaped Hell with a last-minute confession. He must wait a long time in the Ante-Purgatory because, as he explains, "io indugiai al fine i buon sospiri" [I put off good sighs to the last] (4.132). The good sighs of repentance and confession have saved Belacqua, and in the *Purgatorio* this is the mode of confession—speech that promises relief from suffering and progress toward self-understanding.

Dante drives home the lesson of the merit of last-minute repentance with one more story, that of Buonconte da Montefeltro, who relates with great pathos the end of his life and his last moments of consciousness. Mortally wounded in battle, he stumbled to the edge of a remote stream: "fuggendo a piede e 'nsanguinando il piano. / Quivi perdei la vista e la parola; / nel nome di Maria fini'" [with the throat

deeply cleft, fleeing on foot and bloodying the grass. There I lost sight and speech. I ended on the name of Mary] (5.99–101). Here again bodily mutilation is transcended by speech; the last whispered name, the final fleeting thought saves him. The Devil is so angered by this last-minute escape that he sends a flood to wash Buonconte's body away so that it is never found. But he cannot harm the dead soldier's soul, which has escaped the punishments of Hell by pronouncing the miraculous name.

When Dante enters Purgatory proper, he beats his breast three times to show contrition, and the angel inscribes the seven Ps, representing the Seven Deadly Sins, on his forehead. Unlike the inscriptions of sin in Hell, these signs of sin are visible and readable; they can be effaced by the meritorious suffering and speech of the penitents.

The salutary shame of confession is especially evident in the case of Guido Guinicelli, Dante's poetic "father," who explains to the poet what sin his group is expiating: "però si parton 'Soddoma' gridando, / rimproverando a sè, com' hai udito, / ed aiutàn l'arsura vergognando" [therefore they go off crying "Sodom," as thou has heard, in self-reproach and by their shame they aid the burning] (26.79–81). Guido and his group are atoning for the sin of homosexuality; by their loud vocal confessions they deliberately fan the flames they endure. The operative principle of this confession is the same, literally, as that described by Thomas Aquinas: "vergognando" (*verecundia*).

The culminating event of the *Purgatorio* is Dante's own confession in cantos 30 and 31. Like those noted above, it occurs in a similar collective and liturgical setting: the pageant of revelation which occupies the whole of canto 29. Matilda's words, "Beati quorum tecta sunt peccata," are an intimation to the poet that he cannot join the Church Triumphant until he has undergone penance himself. When Beatrice appears, she renders Matilda's message explicit: "God's high decrees would be broken if Lethe were passed and such a draught were tasted without some scot of penitence and shedding of tears" (30.142–45). The pageant has momentarily come to a halt, and Dante, who is directly named by Beatrice, is called upon to make a personal revelation of sin.

Sinclair has seen the importance of the break between the pageant and the personal religious experience that follows: "The twenty-ninth canto is occupied with revelation and the Church; it is all public and impersonal. The next two cantos are the most intimately personal in the *Divine Comedy*" (411). The whole poem has reached an important

historical turning point, which, according to Georges Duby, was prepared gradually by the twelfth century and culminated in a radical change in mentality between 1300 and 1350:

Les marques évidentes des conquêtes d'une autonomie personnelle se multiplient dans le cours du XII^e siècle. . . .

. . . L'idée prend corps, bouleversant, parmi les savants qui méditent sur le texte de l'Écriture, que le salut ne s'acquiert pas par la seule participation à des rites, dans une passivité moutonnaire, mais se 'gagne' par une transformation de soi-même. C'est une invite à l'introspection, à l'exploration de sa propre conscience, puisque la faute n'apparaît plus résider dans l'acte mais dans l'intention, qu'elle est censée se blottir dans l'intimité de l'âme. A l'intérieur de l'être, dans un espace privé qui n'a plus rien de communautaire, se transportent les procédures de régulation morale. On se lave de la souillure par la contrition, par le désir surtout de se rénover, par un effort sur soi, de raison, dit Abélard, d'amour, dit saint Bernard, l'un et l'autre d'accord sur la nécessité d'un amendement personnel. ("Situation" 505, 506-7)

The Scholastic reinterpretation of the sacrament of penance with its insistence on confession is symptomatic of the change that Duby here describes. The progression from collective pageant to personal sacrament which we observe in the *Purgatorio* marks the emergence of a new form of religious subjectivity.

As we have already seen, confession is a fundamental discourse of the *Comedy*, but here its importance and modernity are particularly striking because it is the poet himself who is obliged to confess. His individuality is more strongly asserted than that of any other subject in the poem because he alone makes a confession entirely alone, without the collective backdrop of a group of sinners. His individual spiritual experience stands out most pointedly from the collective liturgical form of religion.

As many commentators have observed, Dante is in exact conformity with the Scholastic definitions of the sacrament as consisting of *contritio cordis*, *confessio oris*, and *satisfactio operis*. As remorse wells up within his heart following Beatrice's accusation, he experiences contrition. Three metaphors express this emotion: the melting of ice, the shattering of a crossbow that has been cranked up too far, and the uprooting of a tree. These images seem to be an almost etymological

meditation on the word *contritio*, which means "to break." Apropos of the crossbow, Singleton states: "The simile is one that finds its allusive relevance in being precisely one of a 'breaking,' the literal meaning of *contritio*, so that contrition of the heart is here continued into the act of confession" (*Commentary* 2:758). As with all the other personae in the *Comedy*, Dante's own confession is as significant in its expressivity as in its content:

Dopo la tratta d' un sospiro amaro,
a pena ebbi la voce che rispose,
e le labbra a fatica la formarò.
Piangendo dissi: "Le presenti cose
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose."

(31.31-36)

After heaving a bitter sigh I had hardly the voice to answer and the lips shaped it with difficulty; weeping, I said: "Present things with their false pleasure turned my steps as soon as your face was hid."

He has been accused of betraying the spiritual desire inspired in him by Beatrice for that object "beyond which there is nothing to be longed for" (31.24). His actual confession is generic and perfunctory: "Present things with their false pleasure. . . ." There is no detailed account of every sin ever committed, no casuistical weighing of mental states and degrees of assent; that will be the product of a later period that will continue what Dante and his age have begun here. It is more important that words express outwardly the inner transformation wrought by contrition. The voice breaks, and weeping signifies the inner melting of the heart, "piangendo dissi." Words must become motivated signs by the performative power of the sacrament and participate in the great order of similitude which *is* spiritual reality:

. . . Le cose tutte quante
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.

(*Par.* 1.103-5)

All things whatsoever have order among themselves, and this is the form that makes the universe resemble God.

These words are the beginning of Beatrice's lesson to Dante in Paradise about the order of the universe. They express the ultimate theological basis of medieval semiotics, the idea that all of creation is a divine book held together by a hidden order or resemblance ("simigliante"). Sacramental signs, aided by grace, are those that come closest to expressing man in his "real" presence to the world. This is why for Dante the form of confession is inseparable from its content.

Only absolution remains for Dante's confession to be complete, and this is signified by his immersion in the waters of Lethe by Beatrice. The heavenly chorus chants Psalm 50, familiar to Dante as one of the most beautiful hymns of the liturgy: "Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor."

Like Virgil's Lethe described in the *Aeneid*, the river that separates Paradise from Purgatory completes the purgative process by erasing from memory events from a sinful past life. But as was the case with the judgment scene of Minos and Rhadamanthus, this Virgilian element reveals as much about Dante's originality and historical specificity as it does about his borrowing from a classical source. Dante's confessional scene contains many echoes of Virgil, but significantly Virgil himself, Dante's "dolcissimo padre," has left him. This is because Dante-the-epic-poet, named by Beatrice, has become Dante-the-confessant, and his narrative has shifted from the story of a heroic voyage to that of a sacramental confession. This is why his epic guide and precursor disappears just before Dante begins his confession. The great pagan poet can be of no assistance when Dante turns sacramental discourse into literature.

Many of the key Virgilian symbols are given a final reinterpretation in this scene. Tears, the "lacrimae rerum" (*Aen.* 1.462), become the tears of contrition. Memory, the anticipated consolation of Aeneas, "forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit" (*Aen.* 1.203), becomes the salutary recollection of sin, something entirely different. And finally the Lethe itself acquires a totally different meaning in the Christian eschatological scene. In Virgil it prepares men for reentry into history, and it allows the Latin poet to prophesize and glorify the "imperium sine fine" of Rome. Dante, on the contrary, crosses Lethe to discover Paradise, the permanent abode of Christian saints who dwell in a medieval utopia of eternal familiarity with God.²⁴

THE SIMPLICITY OF CONFESSION

Most confessions in *The Divine Comedy* lack the detail that confession in the West would eventually acquire, with Lateran acting as the catalyst for more and more detailed confessions. At the dawn of the age in which man became a "bête d'aveu," in Foucault's words, confession was still a simple narration of one's sins, often told only once in a lifetime.

Following the imposition of annual confession, the Church embarked on a pedagogical mission to educate priests and the laity regarding their duties to confession. A vast literature of *Summa confessorum*, *Modus confitendi*, and *Summa de casibus conscientiae* followed in the wake of Lateran and brought the exacting, scrupulous distinctions of the Schoolmen to the population at large. But this was a slow development that did not really get into high gear until the invention of printing and the spread of vernacular editions of the casuists. The works of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), Angelus de Clavasio (author of the *Angelica*, 1480), and Andreas Escobar (d. 1427) were not "publishing phenomena" until the sixteenth century (Tentler 28–46).

The refined dissection of sin and the scrupulous conscience were products of a later age. In Dante's era the pedagogy of confession was conducted largely by sermons, and the faithful were taught to analyse their sins according to a simple rhetorical formula: "Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando." An authority on such literature summarizes the popular attitude that priests hoped to foster among the faithful: "L'image du péché reste encore très objectivée. On se limite aussi, semble-t-il, à une conception stricte de la confession" (Beriou 88). This succinct representation of sin and guilt is consistent with Dante's own laconic confession in the *Purgatorio* and the terse confessions throughout his work.

Of course, a work of art would not presume to be as frank as a real confession, since it would give scandal. A real confession was protected by the *sigillum* or confessional seal of secrecy. But the simple description of sin is not explainable by prudishness or the censorship of art; medieval literature was much less controlled by rules of "bienséance" than later forms of expression and is typically much less inhibited or "repressed" in its treatment of sexuality and violence. The *Inferno* especially will not be found lacking in explicit cruelty.

ONE FLESH

To a large extent, if sexuality in *The Divine Comedy* is not as florid and tortured an affair as in later works, it is because in actual life it had not yet been so complicated. The teaching of the moral theologians had not been extended to the population at large; obligatory annual confession was the instrument by which a more complicated sexuality would be disseminated. In Dante's great seduction scene, for example, the lovers Paolo and Francesca submit to their passion with an almost natural resignation; there is no prolonged resistance and inner drama. Their passion as it is lived seems to lack the dimension of guilt which only comes after the fact. The act itself hardly seems worthy of mention; Francesca simply says, "We read no more that day." For Dante and his age, sexuality was not yet the complex affair it was to become.

The tragic couple are guilty above all of transgressing the laws of marriage. The real evil that ensues is of a social nature—adultery leads to jealousy and murder. For the laity, sexuality must simply be made to conform to the laws of Christian marriage. It is treated first and foremost as a threat to the fabric of personal relations upon which feudalism rests. The Paolo and Francesca story illustrates the violent results of adultery, as does the "source" of the lovers' behavior, the story of Lancelot and Guinevere. The idealized society of the Round Table was brought down by Lancelot's transgression of the feudal bond of personal loyalty to King Arthur.

As I have mentioned above, the "sexual" content of Dante's story is almost nonexistent. For the laity, sexuality is not yet haunted by all the deviations and pathologies of a later age. Doubtless the monks had already been waging a more complex and solitary war of analysis against sexuality, but mandatory confession and spiritual guidance were only beginning to spread these notions to the population at large. At this juncture, "sexuality" had not yet arrived on the scene. What does exist in Dante's text are the "peccator carnali," and their sins of the *flesh* are quite different from our notion of sexuality.

Attention to the details of the lovers' narrative reveals some of the key features of the concept of the flesh. The first noteworthy aspect of their narration is the prevalence of "we" and "us" throughout their story: "*Noi* udiremo . . . Amor condusse *noi* ad una morte . . . *Noi* leggevamo un giorno per diletto . . ." (*Inf.* 5.95, 106, 127, emphasis added). All the sinners in this circle appear in pairs, and Francesca tells us that Paolo "may never from me be separated more" (5.135). The early

Christian idea of the flesh implies that sexuality forms an irrevocable bond between two people. The subtext here is doubtless St. Paul's commentary upon marriage: "et erunt duo in carne una" (Eph. 5.22).

This explains why the lovers appear together and their entire confession is in the first person plural. From beginning to end, their carnality has been an intersubjective experience. It starts with an intimate joint reading. Side by side the young wife and her husband's brother follow the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere until the moment when "that smile, so thirsted for, was kissed by such a lover" (5.133-34). At this point, the word of the romance becomes flesh as Paolo kisses Francesca and the book is put aside: "We read no more that day" (5.138). Medieval carnality is based upon an easy transitivity between the word and the flesh. Books become people, the text has been a "Galahad" to the couple, and literary kisses become actual ones, as the two lovers become *caro una*. Whether it be a narrative of sin or of redemption, sexuality and textuality are unitive experiences within this culture.

It is interesting to note that, for Freud, the kiss hearkens back to infantile sexuality and the autoeroticism of the oral stage. The kiss is a sign of the "erotogenic significance of the labial region" (7:182). This "perverse" origin of adult sexuality threatens to reassert itself as certain types become "epicures of kissing," resort to "perverse kissing," or drink and smoke in excess.

Dante's transgressive kiss is of a different nature. It is the moment of an illicit unification of the flesh which threatens the social order, but it carries with it no sign of a disorder within sexuality itself. The kiss can stand unproblematically as a synecdoche for the whole unitive carnal experience, whereas Freud singles it out as an emblem of the autoerotic curse hanging over adult sexuality. In the Middle Ages, reading, carnality, and confession are still shared experiences, and the word evokes total human presences in the flesh.

The notion of the flesh was about to undergo certain profound changes, however. The clerics who shaped the consciousness of medieval Europe were hard at work elaborating their theories and pondering cases of conscience. A few years before Dante wrote the *Comedia*, Albert the Great had carefully analyzed what positions were licit for sexual intercourse, and confessors were being instructed to interrogate their married penitents closely on such matters (Tentler 189). In the centuries following Lateran, the casuists would develop ever more elaborate lists and nuances in sexual deviations. Hervé Martin observes: "Les moralistes, dans leur hantise du sexe, établissent une

échelle de gravité très détaillée des péchés de la chair. Dans la *Brève et Générale Confession*, ils sont répartis en seize catégories par ordre de gravité, depuis le baiser impudique jusqu'à la zoophilie" (124). Confession in *The Divine Comedy* is a relatively straightforward declaration because it was such in actual practice. As the centuries passed, confession would grow in complexity and refinement. The unitive experience and discourse of *la chair* would give way to the solitary *passions* of the soul. The great chain of "simigliante" would be broken by the theory of representation.

THE AGE OF THE CONFESSIONAL

Anchorage in space is an economico-political form which needs to be studied in detail.

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Du 17e siècle, âge d'or de la direction spirituelle . . .

DICIONNAIRE DE LA SPIRITUALITÉ

"Le Confessionnal" is the title of a dramatic chapter in Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*, a historical novel about the d'Effiat conspiracy (1641–42). The denouement is set in motion by a fateful rendezvous of the protagonists in a confessional in the church of St. Eustache. The lover-conspirators, Marie de Gonzague and Cinq-Mars, kneel on either side of the penitential stall, separated by their counselor and spiritual director, Abbé Quillet. But their fate is sealed when a hostile confessor, Père Joseph, chief of Richelieu's spy network, slips secretly into the box and overhears their confession of an outlawed betrothal and a plot to overthrow Richelieu. The young Cinq-Mars will be beheaded for treason, and Marie married off to the king of Poland to solidify one of Richelieu's European alliances.

The episode is reminiscent of a common theatrical scene, the concealed eavesdropper who listens *en cachette* to a conversation, but it also points to a historically specific scene of truth, desire, and surveillance, for the confessional was invented in the sixteenth century and introduced in France precisely during the period Vigny evokes. An art historian gives this account of the appearance of the new church furnishing:

L'histoire du Confessionnal débute *ex abrupto* avec l'époque que nous envisageons: elle n'a pas de préface médiévale. Jusqu'à la Réforme, le prêtre, assis dans une cathèdre ou dans une stalle du chœur, entendait les aveux du fidèle agenouillé devant lui ou à ses côtés; désormais, les deux interlocuteurs seront séparés par

des grilles ou par des panneaux ajourés. C'est au milieu du XVI^{ème} siècle qu'apparaît le meuble nouveau. (Fierens 28)

The confessional is an architectural expression of the Counter-Reformation's insistence upon the sacrament of penance, which had been attacked by Luther and other Protestants. Confession and its vocal counterpart, preaching, were the twin disciplines by which the Church hoped to reestablish itself after the Reformation. The confessional and the pulpit, or "chaire de vérité," were innovations of baroque church architecture. In some churches an attempt was even made to unite them physically, in a single artistic composition. Such was the link between these two instruments of rhetorical conquest.

Even today, contemplating an ornate baroque confessional or pulpit in a Jesuit-style church, one can almost hear the echoes of a sermon from the great age of sacred oratory: "Qu'est-ce donc que ma substance, ô grand Dieu? J'entre dans la vie pour en sortir bientôt" (Bos-suet). Or perhaps this vision of Lazarist missionaries at work might suggest itself: "Ils prononcent leurs sermons les plus pathétiques le soir, à la lueur vacillante des flambeaux, invitant parfois la foule à crier 'Miséricorde!'" (Dompnier 209). Thus aroused by the sermon, the faithful are then led to the darkness and privacy of the confessional to declare their sins. The whole scene unfolds like a baroque painting, drawing its emotional effect from oppositions of light and darkness, public sermon followed by private confession.

These pastoral techniques, typical of the seventeenth century, were the creation of new proselytizing orders like the Jesuits and Lazarists, imbued with the spirit of the Council of Trent (1545-63). Theologically, the council did little else but reaffirm long-standing Scholastic formulas and condemn Protestant departures from doctrine. The subject of confession was treated during the council's fourteenth session, and Scholastic terminology such as "matter and form" and *ex opere operato* was used to define the sacrament. Against Luther and other Protestants who had declared auricular confession of human origin and recent date, the council declared: "To anyone claiming that confession is not a necessary part of the sacrament of penance for the remission of sins, according to divine law . . . *anathema sit*" (Vacandard, 919, my translation).

But pastorally, the council helped define a new style of religion focused upon the ascetic, the subjective, and the personal. It provided an impetus for the counterattack against the Reformation and drew

its strength from the quasi-military discipline of the Jesuits and the individualizing spirituality of the Oratory. Artistically, the council moved against the neopagan spirit of the Renaissance and inspired the baroque style of masters such as Rubens and Bernini, whose works owe much to the new spirituality. Bernini, for example, was an assiduous practitioner of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and his paintings, like Loyola's book, make a direct appeal to the sensibility and imagination of the Christian. In the words of Emile Mâle, the sublime, classicizing Church of the Renaissance gave way to one that was "ardente et passionnée qui connaît l'angoisse, la lutte, et le martyre" (9). Church art represented and fostered these exalted spiritual states.

The role of confession in this reform within the Church was to refine the conscience and strengthen the bond between the priest and his community. As opposed to the Lateran Council, which simply required the sacrament annually, Trent asked for more detail: "Let each individual, after carefully examining and exploring all of the corners and folds of his conscience, confess his sins" (Session 14). Confession also became more frequent; leading spiritual authorities, like St. François de Sales, demanded weekly, and some writers even called for daily, confession. A new casuistry sprang up to guide confessors, and it too reflected a new relationship between the Church and the world:

Après le concile de Trente, une nouvelle casuistique moins juridique fleurira inspirée par un autre esprit. Le droit canon apportant des réponses de moins en moins adéquates à des situations nouvelles nées de la transformation de la société. Les références se feront non plus seulement à des lois écrites mais aussi à une loi morale inscrite dans la conscience; se développera en même temps la notion des circonstances atténuantes. (Delumeau, *Péché* 224)

The accent was upon developing an acute conscience capable of disciplining itself in the changing circumstances of the modern world. Heretofore the individual had looked to religious authorities to lay down what was right and wrong; now a more subtle and efficacious discipline converted the believer into his own inner lawgiver.

Confession at this time also led to spiritual direction for an elite who, for the first time in the history of Christianity, were not exclusively members of the clergy. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the methodology of direction goes back to the Desert Fathers, but the

seventeenth century marks the period when these techniques were first introduced to the lay population at large. In his *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1608), St. François de Sales says that his intention is to instruct those who live "ès villes, ès ménages, en la cour, et qui par leur condition sont obligés de faire une vie commune quant à l'extérieur" (*Oeuvres* 23). He paraphrases St. Teresa of Avila and, before her, the Desert Fathers on the scarcity of good spiritual directors: "Choisissez-en un entre mille, dit Avila; et moi je dis entre dix mille" (*Oeuvres* 40). To the "dirigé(e)," the voice of the director comes directly from God: "Vous le devez écouter comme un Ange qui descend du ciel pour vous y mener. Traitez avec lui à coeur ouvert" (*Oeuvres* 39). "Dévotion," which is de Sales's new concept of a mysticism for all states of life, can improve any human relation; the ideal husband, for example, is "confit au sucre de la dévotion, car l'homme sans dévotion est un animal sévère, âpre et rude" (*Oeuvres* 239).

The confessional, then, is the emblem par excellence of post-Tridentine spirituality. Borrowing Fierens's phrase, we could say that the *ex abrupto* appearance of this device signals a qualitative and quantitative change in the mode of confession and, beyond that, a new configuration of the self in the early modern world. The confessional is a monument to the age of spiritual direction, casuistry, the Jesuit-Jansenist controversies, and the Inquisition. As an ecclesiastical artifact it represents the beginning of a new age in pastoral techniques when, as Foucault says, Western man became "une bête d'aveu." Like the baroque emblem, it is both image and language; its physical disposition and artistic decoration impose a new order of discourse on the practice of confession.

The man who actually invented and promulgated the confessional was St. Charles Borromeo, prime mover at the Council of Trent and reforming bishop of Milan. Figure 5 shows a confessional bearing his statue alongside that of St. François de Sales, a fitting place for these two rivals in praise from the severe Arnauld: "Il semble que Dieu avait donné des grâces particulières à M. de Genève pour conduire les bonnes âmes à la perfection de la vertu par la mortification de l'esprit, et à S. Charles pour ramener les grands pécheurs à la vertu, par la mortification de leur chair et de leurs sens" (522). The passage is from Arnauld's *De la fréquente communion*, in which the Jansenist theologian advocated a return to less frequent communion and severe penance involving suspended absolution. The inventor of the confessional is credited with chastening the flesh, and the popularizer of spiritual di-



Figure 5. Confessional from church of St. John, Malines, Belgium, by Nicholas van der Verken, 1703. Depicted from left to right are St. Charles Borromeo, St. Roch, St. Augustine, and St. François de Sales. Reproduced with permission from the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique, Brussels.

rection is praised for mortifying the spirit. Arnauld interpreted the writings of de Sales and Borromeo in the most rigorist fashion possible, but it is interesting to note that confession and spiritual direction were essential to both the Jansenists and their "laxist" opponents, the Jesuits. All forms of Catholic spirituality paid homage to the figures carved into this Belgian confessional.

Borromeo gives an exacting description of the confessional in his *Instructionum fabricae ecclesiasticae*. So concerned was he with uniformity that some editions of his book even contain a line drawn to the exact length of the cubit to be used in building the structure. Figure 6 represents a model drawn to his exact specifications. Figure 7 shows a page from a French translation of his influential *Instructions to Confessors*.

The author of the *Instructionum* is concerned that the confessional should keep the sexes apart: "In every parish church two confessionals

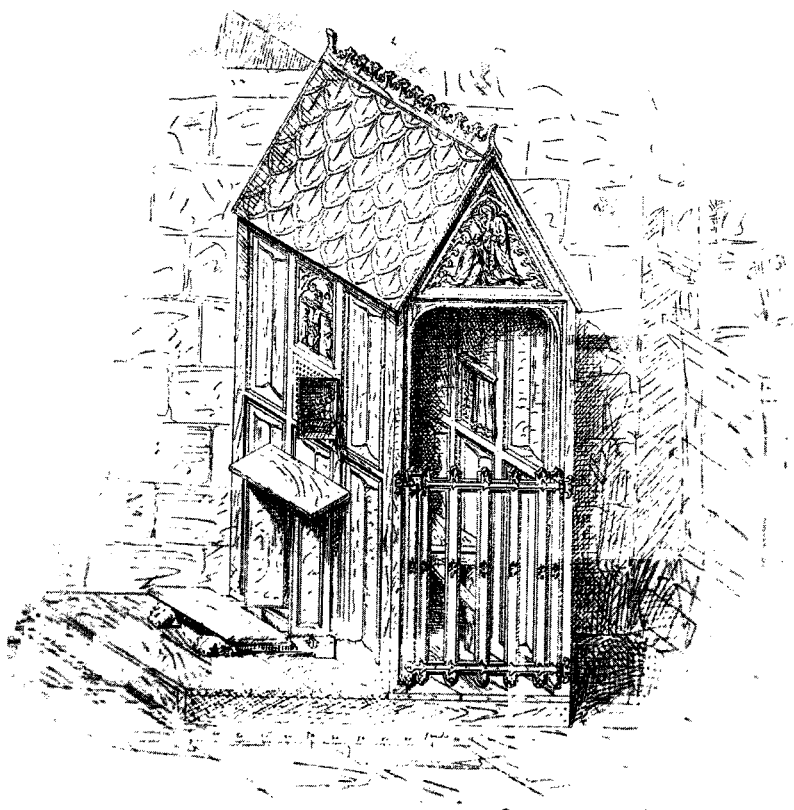


Figure 6. Model of confessional drawn to Borromeo's specifications. From A. Serville, "De la construction et de l'ameublement des églises par S. Charles Borromée." Bulletin des métiers d'art 4 (1905): 360.

should be set up so that men are not mixed with women or stand too close together" (67). The function of the *crates*, the small perforated window separating the priest and the penitent, is to limit all possible contact between the two. It is stipulated that "the perforations should be the size of peas. On the side of the confessor, a thin veil of serge cloth or linen should be hung in front of the window" (70). Until Trent, confession was a face-to-face affair, as can be seen in figure 8, which represents a scene from the late Middle Ages. There were some precedents for Borromeo's box, however. Women were required to veil their faces when confessing in order to maintain propriety during a potentially embarrassing moment for the penitent or a dangerous occasion of scandal for the priest.

FORME DECRIRE L'ETAT DES AMES.

Quartier de....

Rue de....

A l'Enseigne de....

Famille de Pierre.....

1. Le nom. 2. L'âge. 3. La condition.	1. Confirmation. 2. Devoir Paschal. 3. Cœchisme. 4. Prière en commun. 1. 2. 3. 4.	1. Lecture de bons livres. 2. Pratique de la vertu. 3. Assiduité à la Paroisse. 4. Fréquentation des Sacramens. 1. 2. 3. 4.	1. Education des enfans. 2. Querelle, Procès. 3. Facultés. 4. Bonnes qualités & défauts. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Pierre... Âgé de 30. ans. Chapelier.	1. 2. 3. 4. † † † O.	1. 2. 3. 4. O. O. † †	1. 2. 3. 4. O. † Peut faire l'aumône. est sujet à.....



A V I S

DONNEZ

AVX CONFESSEURS
par S. Charles Borromée
Archevêque de Milan.

CHAPITRE PREMIER.

Du Pouvoir du Confesseur.



U'AVCVN Prestre^{pour}
Seculier ou Regular ne voit pas
s'ingere d'administrer le sacre.
Sacrement de Peniten-
ce, s'il n'a par écrit nostre ap-
probation & nostre permission
comme l'ordonne le Concile de
Trente, parce qu'autrement il en-
coureroit l'excommunication, p/s.
A ij

Figure 7. Format for keeping account of parishioners from French translation of Borromeo's Instructions to Confessors. Reprinted with permission of the Yale Divinity School Library.

Schlombs maintains that the probable origin of the *crates* was the grill that separated cloistered nuns from the outside world and that allowed their confessions to be heard by a priest. The illustration in figure 9 shows that, in this particular case, the grill served to divide a women's cloister from the men's. This underscores the confessional grill's signification as a barrier between the sexes. Christianity exalts the ideal of virginity, and some authorities even claim that sexual difference is a result of the Fall. As early as the fourth century, St. Athanasius had said: "God's first intention was not that man be born out of marriage and corruption, but by the transgression of His commandment, Adam's iniquity led to the necessity of sexual union" (qtd. in Delumeau, *Péché* 333). From this perspective, desire itself is a result of the Fall, a punishment for the first act of disobedience.

The confessional grill is emblematic of a peculiarly Christian discourse in which the opposite sex is unattainably other as a result of Original Sin. The confessional dramatizes the fact that the two sexes are divided and that discourse separates as it unites the lovers. Penance is the verbal acknowledgment of this state of fallen desire. This is implicit in Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*, where the lover's discourse in the confessional consecrates an inseparable distance.

In a concrete, historical sense, then, the confessional is a piece of the cloister in the world at large, and it served to generalize the core of



Figure 8. Woodcut depiction of confession by A. Vérard, 1486. Reprinted with permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

cloister spirituality—confession and spiritual direction—with all its implications of an alienated, fallen, human sexuality that could only be transcended by a talking cure.

But there is something peculiar and arresting about confessing to an unseen voice of authority. Separation of a female penitent from the priest is not the only ascetic connotation of the confessional, since men also confessed in this manner. H. C. Lea describes the confessional as "a box in which the confessor sits, with a grill in the side, through which the kneeling penitent can pour the story of his sins into his ghostly father's ear without either seeing the face of the other" (1:395).

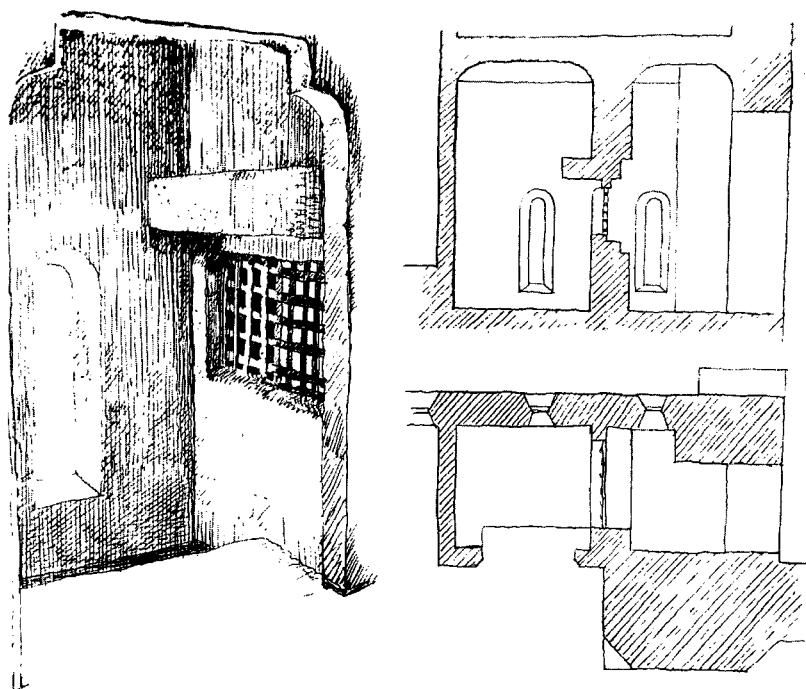


Figure 9. Grill separating men's from women's cloister. From Wilhelm Schlombs, *Die Entwicklung des Beichtstuhls in der Katholischen Kirche*. Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1965.

The grill symbolizes the chaste separation of the sexes and the mortification of the body, but it also institutes a strange conversation with a "ghostly father." As such, it is characteristic of a religion that was shifting from a physical semiotics of the *flesh* toward a hidden spiritual reality, from an *askesis* of the body toward one of the *soul*.

This is evident if we consider the evolution of the grill itself within the symbolism of penance. Figure 10 is Cesare Ripa's allegorical representation of "Penitenza." The accompanying commentary reads: "An exhausted woman, with emaciated face, melancholy and poor dress, looking very intently towards Heaven, and holding with both hands a grill ('una craticola') which is used as a sign of true penance by the holy Theologians, for as the grill stands between the thing being cooked and the fire, so penance is midway between the sinner's pains and the love of God which causes those pains." The allegory, the "soul



Figure 10. Allegorical figure of Penance from Ripa's Iconologia, 1611. Reprinted with permission of the British Library.

of the Baroque," represents penance as an exhausted woman carrying a grill. The ascetic symbolization of the grill here is one of bodily mortification, but it is a grill that punishes by signifying. It is not simply a tool for maceration but rather an instrument that separates the sinner from God and transforms her suffering into a sign of God's love.

Penance is painful/pleasurable separation from God by means of a "sign."

Borromeo's grill institutes the "ghostly" conversation; it is characteristic of a spirituality that increasingly insists on the disposition of the soul and on language as the true means of mortification. Borromeo's grill puts a barrier between the Imaginary, face-to-face encounter between priest and penitent and reduces the encounter to the Symbolic.¹

Spiritual authors from this time often insist on the soul as the real object of mortification and not the body. The Jesuit Bourdaloue calls for a more refined sort of "severity" for the will and the passions, not just for the body, like the older sort of mortification represented by Ripa's illustration. Bourdaloue is much more impressed with a mortification of the *passions* than with exterior asceticism:

Voilà où la sévérité devoit être appliquée: à se comporter avec plus de ménagement, avec plus de condescendance, avec plus de retenue et plus de douceur, à prendre un empire absolu sur soi même, pour agir toujours selon la religion, selon la raison, et jamais selon la passion. Voilà où la sévérité auroit à remporter de plus grandes victoires: *Une passion à combattre lui donneroit mille fois plus de peine que toute autre mortification à pratiquer.*

(2:39, emphasis added)

For the medieval regime of "la chair," we find substituted the world of "les passions," an intermediate realm, between the senses and the intellect, beneath the surface of the flesh, operating invisibly, expressed alternatively in physical and spiritual metaphors. Instead of Dante's system of differing punishments for groups of sinners, we have a new vision of Hell where a single punishment seeks out each individual sinner according to his passions. From a Lazarist sermon comes this passage: "Le feu infernal . . . saura distinguer la malice de chaque péché pour punir rigoureusement la partie du corps et la faculté de l'âme qui auront concouru à un plus grand péché, et leur fera ressentir une plus vive douleur qu'à celles qui n'ont pas été si criminelles. . . . Il distinguera un parricide d'avec un meurtre, un inceste d'avec un adultère" (Delumeau, *Péché* 424).

Descartes will propose a purely somatic description of the passions, but in literature they remain poetically imprecise. Sometimes they are clothed in classical allegories—Venus's spells or Cupid's arrows—sometimes they are represented physiologically as humors or

elements. However represented, the Council of Trent had declared them "good in themselves." How to manage them is the constant concern of all moralists writing at this period.

The confessional, by its occultation of the physical body, sets up the interior combat against the unruly passions, and spiritual direction furnishes the *verbal* arms for gaining mastery over these forces and turning them toward their proper goal, as human eros is transformed into spiritual ecstasy: "Nous devons *jouir* des choses spirituelles et seulement user des corporelles" (243, emphasis added). St. François has employed a key word in the Lacanian vocabulary, and we are again invited to pursue analogies between spiritual direction and analysis.

BAROQUE SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

This time the encounter is even easier to produce. Lacan himself has enthusiastically recognized his own image in baroque spirituality: "Mon discours participe du baroque" (*Encore* 102). Studying the spiritual ecstasies of St. Teresa and other female mystics, he comes to the conclusion that their behavior is not to be explained simply as frustrated and displaced sexual gratification. Unlike Charcot and Freud, he doesn't think mystics, or hysterics for that matter, are women who could be "cured" and restored to psychological unity by recognition of their symptoms and a return to genital sexuality.² One must not "ramener la mystique à des affaires de foutre. Si vous y regardez de près, ce n'est pas ça du tout" (*Encore* 71). Lacan is not a physiological positivist. According to Lacanian theory, human sexuality is based on symbolic exchange; there is no such thing as a purely harmonious sexual act: "Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel" (*Encore* 14). The mystics are not examples of an aberrant sexuality; they *are* the female and, ultimately, the human condition of desire.

Rather than reduce the mystical experience to the physical, Lacan explores the tortured love of the mystics in search of a fuller understanding of human desire. Their mystical marriage to God, which is never consummated physically, is an image of what remains unsatisfied, "en plus," in human sexuality. Beyond the specific love object, which Lacan designates as "l'autre," there is another, unattainable Autre. This Other is the mark inscribed on all objects by the work of the unconscious, and for Lacan that work is essentially linguistic: the unconscious is structured like a language. Thus all human sexuality is "underwritten" by the impersonal, linguistic activity of the uncon-

scious; there is no such thing as a purely somatic encounter between two lovers. Their union is mediated by a cultural code, and the true "object" they seek is a mosaic of unconscious images and socially pre-ordained figures. Human sexuality is a form of communication for Lacan, and as such it exchanges absences as much as presences, signifiers and never signifieds.

In the baroque mystics and artists Lacan sees a kind of eroticism that illustrates the physical constrained by the semiotic. Like many others, he sees "jouissance" on the face of Bernini's St. Teresa, but she is not just a case of hysterical sexual gratification. Lacan remarks that all baroque art is "obscène," meaning that it blatantly exhibits the sexual body, but also that actual intercourse is never represented, it remains out of the picture, *ob-scène*. For Lacan, this illustrates the idea that sexuality is sustained by a relation to an Other, in abstraction to the other, and that this absence or "hole" is inscribed in sexuality by language: "Il y a là un trou, et ce trou s'appelle l'Autre en tant que lieu où la parole . . . fonde la vérité, et avec elle le pacte qui supplée à l'inexistence du rapport sexuel" (*Encore* 103). St. Teresa does "jouit des choses spirituelles" (François de Sales, *Oeuvres* 243), not because her body is hysterically somatizing a sexual act, but because her soul is meditating on the words of the beloved yet impersonal and unconscious Other.

Human love is essentially communicative, founded on a linguistic exchange that ceaselessly attempts to supplement the fundamental lack of rapport between the sexes. This is represented in the material we have examined so far by the cloistered separation of the sexes and especially by the lovers' rendezvous in the confessional in Vigny's novel. As Lancelot and Guinevere were separated by the sword in the forest, Cinq-Mars and Marie de Gonzague are separated by the confessional grill, which represents language as barrier and bond between the couple.

Lacan feels an affinity for the baroque mystics because they had discovered this truth about human love. But the extent of Lacan's belief in religion is that it insists on the truth of desire: "Vous allez être tous convaincus que je crois en Dieu. Je crois à la jouissance de la femme en tant qu'elle est *en plus*" (*Encore* 71). For Lacan, religion is a version of the truth about human desire; it even facilitates human sexuality by insisting on the presence of the Other. Lacan also reveals here the idea that this dimension of sexuality is historically associated with female desire. "La jouissance de la femme" is never satisfied; her sexuality is determined primarily as a lack of the Phallus. But the discourse of

female desire reveals the scandal that the male doesn't "have" the Phallus either. It is a symbol, not an organ; it belongs to the Other. To paraphrase de Sales, "On ne peut jouir *que* spirituellement."

Reading the spiritual directors of the seventeenth century does confirm Lacan's view that mystical discourse is cast in the metaphor of female desire. The soul of both man and woman aspires to be the "épouse du Fils de Dieu" (François de Sales, *Oeuvres* 244). The spiritual journey is a gender crossing that transcends the earthly phallic dichotomy. Man or woman adopts the "en plus," and the "obscene" of feminine desire as a means of intuiting the highest form of spiritual love, the love to come at the end of history when the world is remade and human relations are made perfect.

Lacan's reading of the baroque makes more evident the historical link between Christian confession and psychoanalysis, but what is missing from his recognition scene with the baroque is some commentary about the most preanalytic phenomenon from this period: spiritual direction. Lacan recognizes among the mystics his own theory of desire, but the applicability of his ideas to the baroque is upheld by a similar production of desire within both cultures. Both are marked by a theory of civilization as repression and a practice of confession. In each case, one observes the same principles at work: the coexistence of representations of civilization as repression (Arnauld's "mortification de l'esprit" and "mortification de la chair," for example; Lacan's "non du Père") with the injunction to confess or obedience to the "fundamental rule."

In both cultures, desire is an error and a disappointment, but an illusion that must be verbalized to produce a higher truth. In Christianity this is the truth that human desire is but a weak allegory of divine love; in psychoanalysis it is, ultimately, knowledge of the Symbolic, insight into the signifying veil that covers the object of desire. In both cases the frustrating story of the impossible relation with the other leads to a vision of the Other.

Both practices involve the intervention of an analyst whose hermeneutics will deliver the unconscious truth back to the subject. The form of that intervention took a decisive turn toward the Symbolic and the linguistic with the invention of the confessional and has remained there since. Consider, for instance, the similarities between St. François de Sales's description of spiritual discourse and that of Freud's account of analysis:

Il faut que nos paroles soient enflammées non pas par des cris et actions démesurées, mais par l'affection intérieure; il faut qu'elles sortent du coeur plus que de la bouche. *On a beau dire, mais le coeur parle au coeur, la langue ne parle qu'aux oreilles.*

("Lettre" 321, emphasis added)

[The analyst] must bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the emerging unconscious of the patient, be as the receiver of the telephone to the disc. As the receiver transmutes the electric vibrations induced by the sound-waves back again into sound-waves, so is the physician's unconscious mind able to reconstruct the patient's unconscious, which has directed his associations, from the communications derived from it. (12:115)

In both instances, direction and analysis, the interpersonal encounter is reduced to its purely verbal dimensions. Language itself is then solicited for a hidden meaning that appears almost intuitively and poetically to the analyst. In the chatter of "la langue," a deeper message emerges.

In the seventeenth century, the confessional itself was emblematic of this reduction to the Symbolic. For Freud, the telephone was the proper metaphor. The analyst's unconscious acts as receiver; it decodes the patient's unintelligible signals into sound waves. With all Lacanian puns intended, analysis is a kind of "obscene" telephone call to the Other: two people, their faces hidden from one another, conduct a strange conversation whereby one vents his desires to the other, who, by his office, tries to identify the incognito caller at the other end of the line. From Borromeo's confessional, through Freud's telephone booth, to Lacan's commentary on St. Theresa runs a similar practice of discourse and desire. Both are *tour à tour* coercive and erotic.

Behind the confessional looms the inquisitorial listener, but also an opportunistic *jouisseur*. Parallel to the emphasis on confession, there was also an erotic and comic exploitation of avowal. Mme de Longueville, returning from confession, meets her lover, the author of the *Lettres portugaises*. She says that "elle s'y serait bien ennuyée, si elle n'avait trouvé moyen d'y parler de lui" (Guilleragues 5). The lover, Guilleragues, is inspired by the incident to write "La Chanson du confiteur," a parody of confession in which a betrayed mistress complacently makes "l'aveu d'une passion qui fut toujours tendre et sincère,

etc" (6). The same Mme de Longueville had the poet Sarasin compose for her "Le Directeur," a mock letter of spiritual direction at the end of which "le faux directeur cède au véritable amant" (Sarasin 390). The story behind Vérard's illustration (fig. 8) concerns an adulterous wife confessing to her husband disguised as a priest. Later illustrations of the tale make use of the confessional to enhance the disguise. Sade puts Justine in the confessional to stage his complex transgressions: "Ainsi il entend la confession de sa fille et il voit son cul tout à la fois" (qtd. in Barthes, *Sade* 149).

Judging from contemporary events, our pleasures and pains are still in the age of the confessional and its electronic equivalent.³ In our culture people pay to receive obscene phone calls and to confess to answering machines.⁴

THE VOCABULARY OF CONFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

The secularization of confessional discourse led to the development of a new term to cover all the various kinds of sacred and profane confessing that went on. The new term, which bore all of these meanings during the seventeenth century, was the word "aveu." One can get a sense of the semantic evolution of the word by comparing its feudal meaning, which Perrot describes in his *Institutions publiques et privées de France*, with the meanings from Furetière's seventeenth-century *Dictionnaire universel*.

L'INVESTITURE. De suite après le port de foi et d'hommage, le seigneur "relevait" l'homme agenouillé devant lui, *l'avouait* pour son vassal, lui donnait sur la bouche le baiser de paix et lui remettait le fièf. (Perrot 214, emphasis added)

ADVOUER. Reconnaître la vérité. Il faut advouer que la Providence divine est merveilleuse.

——— Signifie encore en matière de dettes et de crimes, confesser, reconnaître sa faute. Ce criminel a tout advoué à la question.

SE CONFESSER. Signifie, déclarer à un Prestre ses pechez, à dessein d'en recevoir l'absolution. On dit en ce sens qu'un péché confessé est à demi pardonné. (Furetière)

The oldest meaning of "avouer" refers to the feudal ceremony in which the vassal pledged faith to his lord and took possession of his

fief. During the seventeenth century the word came to mean "reconnaître la vérité." So the word itself shifted in meaning from an *objective* verification process whereby someone was vouched for by a superior, to a *subjective* process in which one established the truth about oneself. This evolution is suggestive of the change from a feudal society, in which identity was conferred by another, to the classical age, in which the individual mind became the custodian of truth.

These definitions also make it clear that the word "avouer" can mean either sacred or profane discourse, whereas "se confesser" has a narrow religious meaning. "Aveu" is the more neutral term appropriate for legal, philosophical, medical, and amorous confessions.⁵

Legally, avowal replaced proof by ordeal and oath toward the end of the thirteenth century. The new legal procedure (*inquisitio*) was directed toward confession as the ultimate form of proof: "Tous les efforts de l'instruction tendirent à obtenir de l'inculpé un aveu qui simplifiait tout" (Perrot 515). These techniques were borrowed by secular courts from the courts of the Inquisition and the Dominican order, which had pioneered them in the struggle against heresy. In the secular and ecclesiastical courts, avowal and submission to "la question" continued to be the cornerstone of justice. The burden of proof rested upon the accused, who could either prove the charges by confessing or effectively disculpate himself by surviving the torture and refusing to confess. If he was convicted, his punishment involved a final public confession.

Before the Inquisition, this involved the notorious auto-da-fé, where the convicted heretic, freethinker, or sexual deviant was given one last chance to confess and recant and thus be spared or, if a recidivist, at least strangled before being burned. In the secular courts, a capital offense was punished by a public "supplice" and the "amende honorable" in which the condemned man confessed and proclaimed his crime. The three aspects of a trial—preliminary "question," "amende honorable," and "supplice"—complemented each other. They all raised the subject to a position of absolute verifier of the accusation, and they compelled him to verbalize this truth, first in private while undergoing "la question," next in public both verbally and physically. As Michel Foucault explains, the significance of this spectacle is that it "publie la vérité du crime dans le corps même du supplicié" (*Surveiller* 59). All of this was considered an edifying spectacle for the general public and, more important, for the king and his court. As the illustration shows (fig. 11), the auto-da-fé was an important display of royal

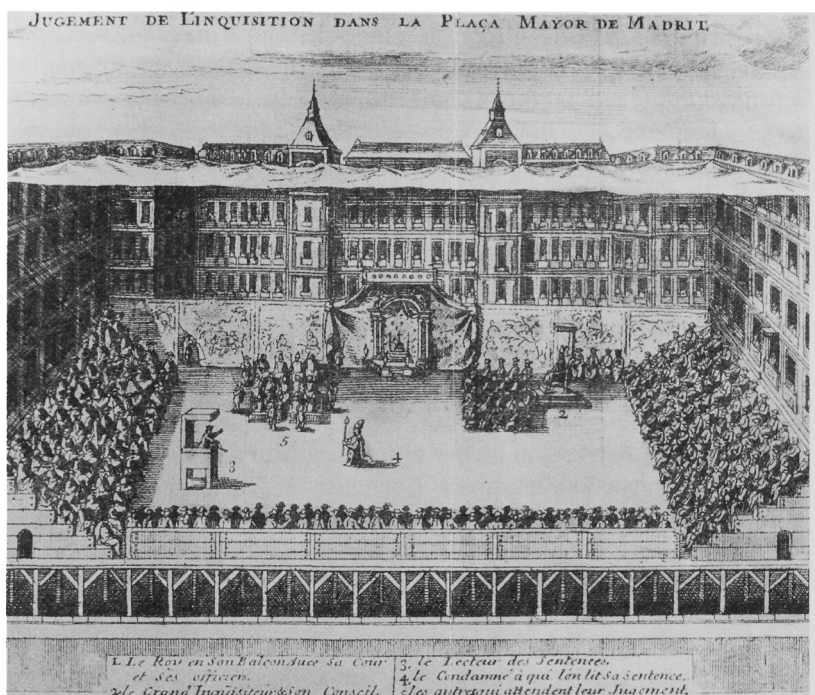


Figure 11. Auto-da-fé in Madrid. From Elias Amezaga, *Auto-da-fe en Valladolid*. Buenos Aires: Graficas Ellacuria, 1966.

power. The same could be said of the “supplice,” where the king was always present, at least symbolically, as a witness to the criminal’s avowal and punishment.

It is important to bear in mind these juridical scenes of avowal and torture when we encounter the words “aveu” and “supplice” in literature. As we saw in Vigny’s passage, the lover’s avowal has meaning on several levels; it is spiritual, sexual, and political. The importance of avowal was derived from confession, but the practice soon invaded almost every important intersubjective relationship—hence Michelet’s irritation that he can hardly distinguish between the language of love and that of spiritual direction: “Si vous écoutiez, témoin invisible, la conversation des belles ruelles, vous ne sauriez pas toujours distinguer qui parle, de l’amant ou du directeur” (*Du Prêtre* 69). Whether in the whispered discourse of lovers and spiritual directors or in the terrible

sentences of inquisitors, one finds the same vocabulary of confession, and the same paradigm of the confessing subject announcing his truth: "L'aveu est un rituel de discours où le sujet qui parle coïncide avec le sujet de l'énoncé" (Foucault, *Surveiller* 51). As we have seen, the confessional is the model for a phenomenological reduction of the self to a "sujet qui parle."

It is characteristic of a century that made some of its strongest statements in the first person. From Descartes's "cogito" to Louis XIV's putative "L'Etat, c'est moi," the classical age invested heavily in the ideal of an introspective subject capable of reaching indubitable truths and speaking them in the first person. The paradox of this total wager on the subject's ability to perceive the truth and represent the state was that, ironically, it creates a fragile subject at once omnipotent but endangered. Descartes's subject is threatened by the possibility of total delusion if the "malin génie" exists, and the monarchical self is maintained only by the machinery of Versailles, which enslaves Louis as much as it assures his power. Perhaps this explains the modernist interest in the classical self: it is a distant parable of the blindness and insight, the power and the impotence, of the ego.

The power and the veracity of confession were also enhanced by the fact that, as Foucault says, it was a "rituel de discours." In law, in religion, and in the code of love, it was a solemn speech act.⁶ I will now make some observations about how and why this ritual was woven into the fabric of society in seventeenth-century France.

CONFESSION AND COURT SOCIETY

The use of confessional discourse did not spread uniformly throughout society in the seventeenth century. As a religious practice, frequent confession and spiritual direction were more widespread among the privileged. The masses were reluctantly led to make summary annual confessions to the parish priest. The bourgeois, and especially their wives, preferred more frequent appointments with mendicant confessors; princes and kings had their own private directors for confession at will. The mystical renewal in France, with its emphasis on spiritual direction, took place chiefly in aristocratic circles in Paris. The literature of avowal we will be studying was also written for aristocrats and reflected their consciousness. So far, I have stressed the importance of the Counter-Reformation and the monastic model in the spread of

confession to all aspects of human life. What needs to be examined now is how confession became an integral part of elite culture during the classical age.

The myths and pageantry of divine right monarchy were profoundly Catholic—the anointing of the king, the idea that the nation was embodied in the king's mystical body, the sacrificial ideal, all of those rituals which were founded on the notion of "le roi-prêtre."⁷ But the reality of political relations hardly conformed to these images. Norbert Elias tells us that the strategy of the absolutist ruler is to divide, not to unify, his subjects: "The observation of tensions and discord between his subjects is especially important to a conserving king in the situation of Louis XIV. The unification of his subjects threatened the king's existence." Elias then cites a passage from Louis's advice to his son that shows that the king was perfectly aware of the need to disunify his subjects: "You must divide your confidence among several. The jealousy of one holds the ambition of the others in check" (*Court Society* 129).

In addition to this deliberately maintained division, the court aristocracy was subject to an erosion of their financial and military power. They had contempt for money matters and did not understand the dynamics of the new bourgeois order. Their fortunes were based on land rent and agricultural production, both of which were poor investments in a mercantilist economy. Advances in technology and mercenary armies made their military services less and less important. From Richelieu onward, it was royal policy to disarm the nobles and destroy their fortifications. More and more the aristocrat was cut off from the base of his "natural" sense of superiority over other men. Far from his ancestral land, no longer a soldier by trade, his whole sense of worth would be won or lost at court.

According to Elias, the Frankfurt school historian of "court society" (*höfische Gesellschaft*), this political system is based on *personal relations*. The courtier must endlessly cultivate personal contacts at court to further his career. All aspects of his public and private life are caught up in his personal intrigues. There is no absolute division between his professional and private life in the modern sense of the word. He lives in the king's household at Versailles; his position or rank at court is dramatized by his part in the complicated etiquette revolving around the king's daily activities. The highest ranking courtiers are admitted to the royal "lever"; others have ceremonial titles associated with the king's hunting, his eating, his "garde-robe, etc." The meaning of this

elaborate etiquette is not the personal vanity of the king; rather, it is a way to enslave the powerful aristocrats by making them completely beholden to the king. The nobility are carefully arranged according to a subtle hierarchy controlled by the king. The system is an attempt to organize rationally a potentially dangerous opposition into carefully balanced factions.

The mentality this structure fosters is that of the reserved social actor capable at all times of concealing his true motives and mastering his impulses. Elias has studied in detail how court society gave rise to a whole array of restraints associated with "civilized" behavior. It was at the princely courts of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe that table manners, toilet etiquette, modesty regarding sexual conduct, and the notions of the "bienséances" were developed. In an apparent paradox, the dominant class of society imposed the strictest norms of "autoconstraint" on itself instead of enforcing this repressive model on the masses. Restraint is thus an elite conduct, a tactic the upper class uses to manage its own sexuality, not repress the proletariat.

In some sense, for Elias, the courtiers are pre-Victorians, passing on their repressive model of civilization to the bourgeoisie, who developed an even stricter regime of public restraint and private emotional life. Elias sees present-day society as one where "*hommes et femmes sont assurés que de fortes autocontraintes et des règles strictes de savoir-vivre limitent l'initiative des individus*" (272). We have inherited the courtly heritage of restraint. But as we shall see, and in keeping with a major theme of this study, the courtly ethic is heavily influenced by confession; repression is only half of the picture. The courtiers are our ancestors, but they were confessed, not repressed.

Despite his theme of "autocontrainte," Elias does mention confession and confidentiality in his study of court society. On one level, confession is a dangerous practice: to reveal one's secrets or weaknesses to another is potentially suicidal. The accomplished courtier is a master of dissimulation, as evinced by La Bruyère's description of the man at court: "*Un homme qui sait la cour est maître de son geste, de ses yeux et de son visage; il est profond, impénétrable; il dissimule les mauvais offices, sourit à ses ennemis, contraint son humeur, déguise ses passions, dément son coeur, parle, agit contre ses sentiments*" (221).

But, paradoxically, the best training for dissimulation was to practice a form of self-observation. "Just as he [the courtier] is forced to

seek the true motives of others behind their controlled outward behavior, just as he is lost if he is unable to unmask the affects and interests of his rivals behind their dispassionate facade, he must know his own passions if he is to conceal them effectively" (Elias, *Court Society* 105). The difficulty was to find a reliable "confident" with whom one could be frank and trust one's secrets.

But beyond this strategic use of confession as a means of training in dissimulation, court society produced a longing for moments of true sincerity. Religious confession presented itself as a haven from the continual falsehood of secular life and as a reprieve from the dire consequences of confession in the world. Bourdaloue makes this distinction between the jeopardy of worldly confession and the benefit of religious confession: "Dans la justice des hommes, la procédure est bien différente: ils ne punissent que ce que l'on découvre; mais dans la justice divine, il n'y a de châtement et de punition que pour ce que l'on cache" (2:125).

The confessional should be added to the list of "refuges de l'intimité" which Orest Ranum discusses in the *Histoire de la vie privée* as the obverse of the oppressive publicity of court life (211–65).⁸ Like the alcove, the ruelle, and the garden, the confessional was a private space where one could put down the social mask and reveal the "true" self. These private spaces are thus paradoxical by-products of court society, and they receive their potential truth value from the prevailing standard of false appearances. In a society whose "professional" ethic was emotional masking and the suppression of spontaneity, the passions retreat to these private domains.

In addition to confession in the strictly religious sense, court society engendered a practice of guidance that closely resembles spiritual direction. La Rochefoucauld, whose links with Augustinian spirituality have been documented by Lafond, constantly denounces dissimulation in his *Maximes* and describes an ideal relation based on sincerity and confidentiality and founded on the same sort of truth obligations as confession: "La sincérité est une ouverture du coeur, qui nous montre tels que nous sommes; c'est un amour de la vérité, une répugnance à se déguiser, un désir de se dédommager de ses défauts, et de les diminuer même par le mérite de les avouer" (116). This is the same verbal rapport, expressed in the same terms, which de Sales recommends that Philotée strive for when she speaks to her spiritual director: "Traitez avec lui à coeur ouvert. . . . Le grand remède contre toutes tentations grandes ou petites, c'est de déployer son coeur et de com-

muniquer les suggestions, ressentiments et affections que nous avons à notre directeur" (39, 266). The remedy for the constraints and falsehoods of social life is a behind-the-scenes, heart-to-heart conversation, a private verbalization of one's faults. La Rochefoucauld says that by this sort of lay confession, "nous nous assujettissons volontairement," and that one who hears such secrets is bound by a law of secrecy, much like a priest.

Thus confessional discourse, in either its religious or secular form, had a particular meaning in court society. It was the offstage voice, the private confidence of the player in the court drama. It was one-half of a duplicitous, double-talking self, the "tout-dire" side of the repressed "rien-dire" public self. St. François de Sales expresses both halves of this double injunction. Public discourse consists of "paroles nettes, civiles et pudiques. Quant aux choses indécentes et folles, l'Apôtre ne veut pas seulement qu'on les nomme" (*Oeuvres* 206); but to the confessor, as we have already seen, one must "déployer son coeur."

The overall picture of court society that emerges with this double injunction is thus difficult to reconcile with a purely repressive model of civilization. For Elias, confession can be viewed as part of the civilizing tendency toward "autoconstraint," but I prefer Foucault's insistence on the difference between confession and repression. Society does not proceed simply by exclusion and censoring; that defines only the negative, juridical aspect of morality. The other half of socialization is the command to verbalize one's feelings. If we sought a succinct word to summarize this aspect of the civilizing process, perhaps the technical term for the confessional secret, *sigillum*, would offer some possibilities. It literally means "seal"; the secrets of confession are covered by a seal of secrecy. But a seal is a sign as well, a paradoxical sign that signifies silence. Society proceeds against the passions by repression, but also by *sigillum*—obliged verbalization followed by a sign of silence.

This new perspective allows one to evaluate all the positive, solicitous aspects of a civilization which bind men to particular power structures. Any discursive system like psychoanalysis or confession in some sense spreads the disease it promises to cure. Practices of avowal are apprenticeships in a language of the passions; they teach the subject to reconstruct his or her experiences according to a certain vocabulary, and they bind one to those expert in that vocabulary. The very idea of the "passions" had to be invented and inculcated by moralists in order for it to be lived, transgressed, and avowed. "La passion" was a disease

that could only be caught and enunciated in aristocratic circles. We have only to think of scenes from Molière in which uninitiated women like Charlotte (*Dom Juan*) or Agnès (*L'Ecole des femmes*) encounter aristocratic seducers and have trouble comprehending the language and strange rituals of "Messieurs-là les courtisans." Charlotte wavers between too literal and too suspicious a reading of Dom Juan's flowery declarations, and Agnès must be taught the language of passion before she can relate to men—and as if to illustrate the continuity of religious discourse and secular gallantry, Molière makes Arnolphe's religious examination of Agnès's conscience the occasion of her avowal of love for Horace.

In similar fashion, *La Princesse de Clèves* shows how passion and avowal are related to court experience. The disease is first caught at court: "Ainsi il y avait une sorte d'agitation sans désordre dans cette cour, qui la rendait très agréable, mais aussi très dangereuse pour une jeune personne" (Lafayette 45). The only way the princess envisages controlling her adulterous desire is either to follow her mother's death-bed advice, "retirez-vous de la cour," or to confess her crime to her own husband. The shock value of the ending comes from the fact that, unlike most courtly lovers, she does not hide her passion and manage it by confiding in an "amie intime" but breaks out of the cycle of courtly love by confessing directly to her husband.

SIGNS OF CONTRADICTION

Historically, the seventeenth century has not yet come to the moment when the private self will be set forth as the only authentic self and a new form of social organization, based on a community of such selves, will be demanded—that is the work of Rousseau—but tensions between the two selves are already apparent. The severest moral critics of court society, the Jansenists, reserved the relation with God entirely for the private, hidden self; the Christian "should lead a life like the others in appearance, but as different from theirs in spirit as the Son of God is from his creatures" (St. Cyran, qtd. in Viner 137). The political world is left intact, abandoned to its own wickedness, while the private self leads an unapparent life of grace.

The possibility of strife between the public court sphere and the private confessing self is apparent in the story behind Crespi's illustration of the sacrament of penance (fig. 12). The painting represents St. John Nepomuc, a recently canonized saint who had been confessor to

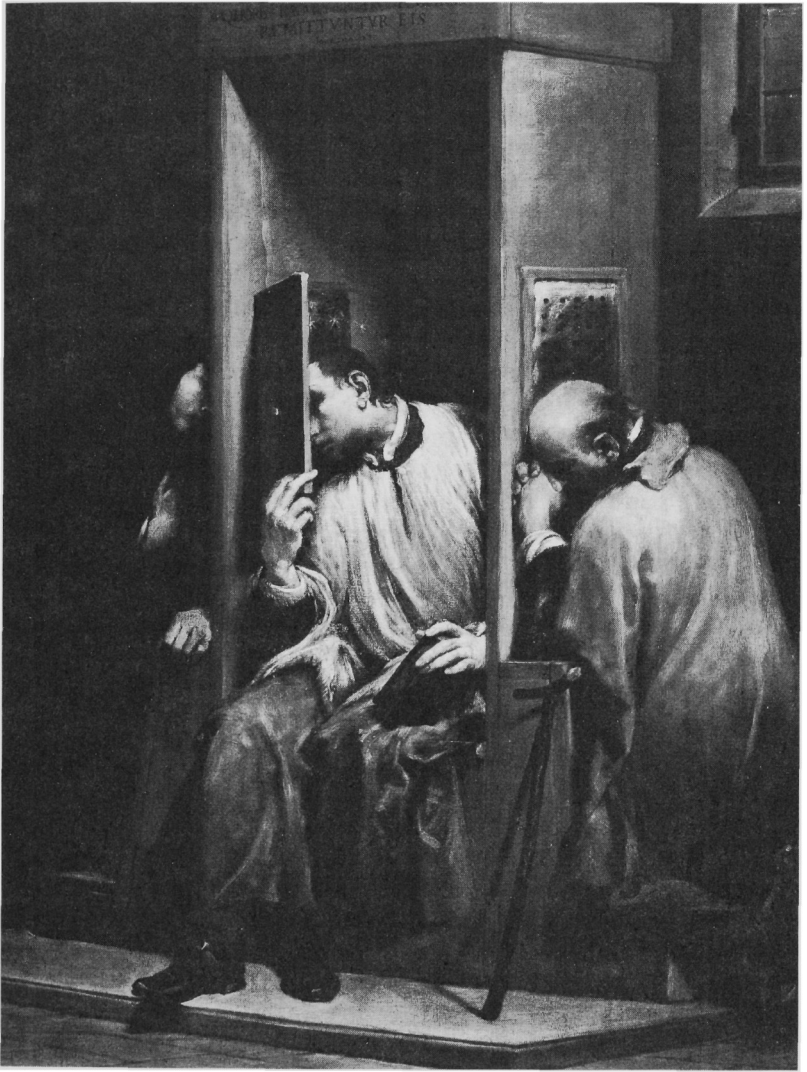


Figure 12. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, St. John Nepomuc Confessing, Turin, Pinacoteca, 1743. Reprinted with permission of Art Resource, New York.

the queen of Bohemia. He could be called the martyr of *sigillum* because he was put to death in 1383 for failing to reveal to the king the content of the queen's confession.⁹ He remained an obscure figure until the seventeenth century, when his canonization was advanced by the Jesuits, themselves confessors to half the courts of Europe.

The painting is of course anachronistic, since the confessional did not exist in 1383, but it serves well to illustrate the tensions of confession in court society. We see the separation by the grill. At the focal point of the painting, the disproportionately large ear of the saint is visible. The symbolism is enhanced by the fact that the ear actually hearing the confession is hidden from representation. The painting performs a sort of visual *sigillum*, both revealing and effacing the secret discourse of confession, suggesting a hiatus between the visual domain and the spiritual, verbal order.

PROSCENIUM AND CONFESSIONAL

*All use the proscenium arch to serve as a fourth wall
behind which the actors are required to behave naturally
and unselfconsciously as if no audience were present.*

J. S. STREET

*. . . que chacun de ceux qui y parleraient fût présumé y
parler avec le même secret que s'il était dans sa chambre.*

CORNEILLE, *Discours des trois unités*

Roughly contemporaneous with the introduction of the confessional in France, another spatial innovation was being imported from Italy: the perspectivist theatrical setting. The multiple "mansions" of the medieval theater were replaced by a single scene in order to enforce the rule of "unité de lieu," and *trompe l'oeil* settings were used to create the illusion that the action of the play was transpiring in a unified, realistic space. The conventional backdrop consisted of the columns, grottoes, and rooms of a temple or palace. The use of a stage curtain to be raised at the beginning of the spectacle and lowered at the end also appeared during the second and third decades of the seventeenth century.

The result of these changes was to raise a barrier between spectator and spectacle. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, "there

was no formalized separation between performers and public" (Mittman 1). The presence of off-duty actors or spectators invading the stage did not compromise medieval and Renaissance theatricality. Medieval religious drama made no attempt to be a realistic portrayal of earthly life; its simultaneous representation of temporal and eternal reality sought to raise spectator and spectacle to a transcendent reality. Renaissance drama promoted the idea that theater and world were one: "all the world's a stage" as Shakespeare's melancholy Jacques proclaims. The mark of classical drama is its insistence on the autonomy of the dramatic space; the reality of the real world and the theatricality of the dramatic world are both founded on a strict separation of the two.

Corneille says the spectator views the action as though hidden behind a wall. He or she occupies the same voyeuristic position as that of Vigny's Père Joseph, able to observe the characters as they move from the "chambre" to the "palais," as they act both on and off the stage of court society. The new theatrical *dispositif* is able to represent simultaneously the space of "civilité" and that of "intimité." These are the two spaces that Roger Chartier identifies in the *Histoire de la vie privée* as being the twin aspects of daily life at court:

L'espace gouverné par la civilité est celui de l'existence collective, de la sociabilité distinctive de la cour et des salons, ou bien du rituel social en son entier dont les normes obligées doivent contraindre tous les individus, quelle que soit leur condition. À l'inverse, l'intimité exige des lieux retranchés, des espaces séparés ou trouver solitude, secret, silence. Le jardin, la chambre—mais plus encore l'alcove et la ruelle—l'étude et le cabinet offrent de telles retraites qui, tout ensemble, cachent ce qui ne doit ou ne peut plus être montré (les soins du corps, les fonctions naturelles, les gestes de l'amour) et abritent des pratiques associées plus qu'auparavant à l'isolement: ainsi la prière ou la lecture. (165)

In the same volume, J.-M. Goulemot seems to identify the classical stage exclusively with the space and the norms of "civilité." He sees the "bienséances" and the tendency toward abstract, universal representation as expressions of the same repressive code that governs public court behavior: "C'est d'abord le processus d'occultation du privé et de l'intime qui définit l'âge classique. Qu'il s'agisse de la poésie lyrique ou du théâtre, le mouvement est le même" (380).

I would see this as only half of the picture. In the passage I cited from the *Discours*, Corneille specifically uses the words "secret" and "chambre," a clear indication that by means of the convention of the fourth wall he hoped to analyze his characters in their "intimité." I would grant that the civil ethic of court society is never entirely abandoned; the plays were public spectacles and as such governed by the rules of decorum. Despite the fiction of privacy being invaded, the characters maintain almost the same level of dignity as they show in public. But too much attention is paid to the repressive aspect of the *bienséances*. Their real effect is to legitimize the discourse of desire. They are only a detour, a protocol to be observed in the ever-increasing loquacity of the passions in the West. As part of the civilizing process, their function is not to silence desire but to orchestrate its expression and management.

Failure to understand the *bienséances* in this light leads Goulemot to characterize the classical stage as a "rituel distant et glacé" (383). One is immediately reminded of Phèdre's words: "Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler." Court behavior is marked by distance, verbal restraint, and even coldness, but these are signs of a new, mediated erotic, not the triumph of repression. There is a tension between refined speech and underlying passion which it is impossible to characterize univocally as either moral or erotic.

Formally, the new theatrical device was thus admirably suited to psychological investigation. An increasingly dignified audience raises the level of taste from vulgar farce or baroque showiness to a more serious plane. An aristocratic audience sees its class destiny played out before it in the drama of love and duty to the state. There is an increasing sobriety in both decor and theme, and *words* carry more of the meaning than visual display. There is more subjective probing in the plays of Corneille, Racine, and Molière than in the typical Renaissance drama. Jacques Truchet admirably sums up the interiorizing tendency in the new tragedy of the 1640s:

La nouvelle tragédie s'intéresse aux causes des événements, aux mobiles profonds des actes. D'où l'importance de la délibération dans ce théâtre, et de l'analyse. Au lieu d'exhiber lyriquement ou frénétiquement leur amour, leur espoir, leur haine ou leur colère, ces personnages s'interrogent sur eux-mêmes, cherchant à cerner la vérité de leur être. C'est par exemple Auguste analysant son attitude face à son propre pouvoir, à son devoir, à son projet hé-

roïque, c'est Pauline faisant un admirable effort de lucidité pour voir clair dans son coeur. (135)

As we will see, confessional scenes are a key element in this new theater, and, if it is not stretching analogies too far, I would see equivalences between the confessional and the proscenium. It is well documented, by Bray among others, that Counter-Reformation Italy was the inspiration for many of the precepts of French classicism. I am not proposing anything like a direct influence of religious architectural innovations on literature, but rather a suggestive coincidence, similar discourses and similar spatial dispositions for staging interiority in the seventeenth century.

A final structural parallel between the confessional and the proscenium concerns the unseen, Other *destinataire*. Both confessional and proscenium create the hidden spectator. The audience, like the confessor or the analyst, is outside the communicational network. To be more precise, the audience occupies the impersonal place suggested by the real analyst; the classical audience is totally beyond the dialogue of the acting subjects. The analyst and the confessor, by hiding their faces, seek to invoke the presence of the Other who overhears their conversation. The hidden priest represents an invisible God, and the invisible analyst dramatizes the presence of the Symbolic order.

The classical stage becomes less and less a visual spectacle as the century advances; it insists more and more on the text of human interactions. It asks the question whether the truths of the heart can be known: "Vous ne savez pas lire au fond de mon coeur," Phèdre complains to Hippolyte. As a subject she remains misunderstood by others and by herself. Can her enigma be resolved from within the play—by Oenone, or Hippolyte, or Thésée—or only from without, by an Other? Can her desire be addressed to anyone except the obscene spectator?

A COEUR OUVERT: HEROIC AVOWAL IN CORNEILLE

Pauline a l'âme noble et parle à coeur ouvert.

POLYEUCTE

Entre, entre à son exemple au cabinet du coeur . . .

L'IMITATION DE JESUS CHRIST

Corneille was educated by Jesuits and remained in close contact with his masters of the Collège de Rouen throughout his life. His nephew, Fontenelle, in his "Vie de Corneille," says of him: "Il a eu souvent besoin d'être rassuré par des casuistes sur ses pièces de théâtre" (25). Corneille himself seems to substantiate this image of an artist seeking the approval of religious authorities by his claim in the preface to *Attila* that he submits all of his work "à la censure des puissances tant ecclésiastiques que séculières, sous lesquelles Dieu me fait vivre" (712).¹

Recently, Marc Fumaroli has studied in detail the lifelong moral and literary collaboration between Corneille and one of his teachers, Père Delidel, author of the anti-Jansenist *Théologie des saints*. Published in 1668, the book is prefaced by an "Ode au P. Delidel" in which Corneille credits the "savant et pieux écrivain" with his own artistic genesis and states his desire to follow his mentor's spiritual lesson. By prefacing this theological tract, Corneille was clearly siding with the Jesuits in their dispute with the Jansenists over the question of grace. In a more self-serving vein, he was also lining up against the persecutors of the theater. At the time of the "Ode," the poet had already replied to Nicole's antitheatrical *Traité de la comédie* by taking the position, in the preface to *Attila*, that his own theater was capable of purging any wicked passion it might arouse. So on the questions of grace and the theater, Corneille took a "Jesuit" position. These public stances are signs of a deeper debt of Corneille to his teachers, conscious declarations pointing toward unconscious, structural affinities between teacher and pupil.

Corneille's first experience of the theater was the Latin school plays staged by his teachers in Rouen. In these productions, the myths of classical antiquity became vehicles for Jesuit morality. Syncretism and interpretive ingenuity allowed the Christian humanists of Corneille's age to read spiritual allegories into ostensibly pagan stories. Thus, as Père Rotrou explains, "Les furies d'Oreste, la roue d'Ixion, etc. . . . ne furent jamais autre chose que le remords d'une mauvaise conscience" (qtd. in Rivaille 473). This same interpretation turns up in an early play of Corneille's. A similar eclectic attitude toward pagan culture can be found in the writings of Racine, who, interestingly enough, finds references to confession and attrition in Plutarch and Plato (2:1141).²

André Stegmann has called the Jesuit neo-Latin theater "Cornélien avant la lettre" in its emphasis on moral conflict and its similar choice of historical subject matter. He explains how Jesuit spirituality was adapted to the school plays: "L'ascèse toute spirituelle de St. Ignace est transposée en ascèse héroïque. L'individu accepte de se sacrifier à un ordre spirituel ou politique, préférable à son bonheur ou intérêt personnel" (*Héroïsme* 56). An ambivalent, secularized version of Ignatian asceticism and sacrifice can also be found in Corneille's theater: Rodrigue sacrifices love to family honor; Horace transcends friendship, family, and even personal honor for Rome; Auguste learns to accept the ingratitude of friends and the solitude of power and forgives his enemies for the good of the state. Polyeucte carries the ascetic pattern to its logical conclusion by sacrificing all human values to his faith.

Psychologically, Corneille's conception of heroism owes much to the asceticism of the new spirituality; his theater focuses less on the violent "geste" and more on the inner battles of heroic consciousness. The violent scenes of heroic action are kept off stage as much for formal reasons as for decorum. His subject is heroism in the first person, the discursive probing of the self, the moment before words give way to mute, ambiguous actions.

In the light of Lacan's interpretation of baroque spirituality, Stegmann's "ascèse héroïque" also suggests that asceticism in general and confession in particular can be understood as a certain historical form of the erotic. There is a sort of heroic *jouissance* that the protagonist derives from triumph over the self and verbal acknowledgment of the loss of the object. Confession situates the subject in the simultaneous enunciation and suspension of desire. Faced with the loss of the object, the hero's heart swells with the same sort of ascetic pleasure that Lacan sees on the face of Bernini's St. Theresa.

For Lacan, the mystics reveal the truth of human desire: the provisional obstacle to desire is permanent; the apparently external impediment represents a permanent interior distance between the subject and the object of his desire; *jouissance* comes from a rapport with the Other. For me, the confessional is the historical figure of this specifically Western and Christian experience of desire. It stages desire as a strange open-ended conversation with an unseen third party, and it inscribes the subject in a network of pastoral power.

This interpretation of the meaning of asceticism as, not the simple destruction of the passions, but their verbal revelation followed by masochistic pleasure puts me in the camp of those who emphasize libido and energy, not dispassionate reason, in Corneille. Octave Nadal is on the right track when he says: "C'est la sensibilité qui, chez Corneille, met l'homme debout, rassemble les activités spirituelles, les bande et les oriente" (22). The Cornelian ethic has more to do with the post-Tridentine appeal to the passions than with Stoic *ataraxia*.

A first look at a famous scene from *Le Cid* illustrates this idea of passion and asceticism. The love of Rodrigue and Chimène rises to a poetic pitch during the chamber scene when they are apparently lost to each other. Never is Rodrigue so crushed by despair at the inseparable distance between himself and Chimène; he invites death at her hand: "Le coup m'en sera doux"; yet never is he so insolent and full of defiant energy (936). He shows Chimène the sword with which he has killed her father; there is no possibility for the present that the two lovers could be reconciled. Yet out of this scene of mutual asceticism—avowal on the part of Chimène and an implicit penance by Rodrigue, who seeks punishment for his crime—the lovers draw a passionate energy that will sustain them.

Corneille's contemporaries were shocked and excited by this scene; in the *Examen* of the play, the author notes: "Il s'élevait un certain frémissement dans l'assemblée, qui marquait une curiosité merveilleuse et un redoublement d'attention." It is one of the most erotic moments in his theater because of the juxtaposition of the forbidden presence of Rodrigue in Chimène's apartment and the rhetorical restraint exercised by the two characters. Chimène and Rodrigue perform an ascetic duet that consecrates their physical separation but accomplishes something analogous to the heart-to-heart mystical union. Acknowledgment of the Other, the *mise en discours* of desire, is what is erotic, not just physical intimacy.

The subject of this study is the role of confession in this process,

and accordingly, I wish to examine further the links between our author and the main currents of confessional practices in his day. Of particular interest to us, in the general current of Jesuit influence upon Corneille, is the Jesuit attitude toward confession. Jesuit moral teaching was based on what Louis Rivaille calls a "culture de la volonté" (468). Inspired by Molina's confidence in "libre arbitre," Jesuit educators sought to inculcate a strong will and deliberative habits on the part of their students by means of "sermons, allocutions de fin de semaine, conférences morales; dans les hautes classes, méditations, examens de consciences, 'récollements,' où les jeunes gens devaient trouver la clarté de la décision et puiser la force de l'exécution" (468).

These procedures were based on certain principles of Scholastic psychology, which taught that the human soul is composed of (1) an *intellect* capable of ascertaining the truth, (2) a sovereign *will*, enlightened by the intellect and capable of governing the third part of the soul, and (3) the *passions*, which have a use in the execution of its designs. The role of confession and "recollection" was to take stock of the passions and eventually to put them to good use. Only when the passions were *antecedentes*, when they circumvented *libre-arbitre* and precipitated the subject toward pleasure instead of the truth, were they evil. By correct moral training, the energy of an *antecedens passio* could be transferred into a *passio consequens*, which followed upon the deliberation of the intellect and was supposed to arouse the soul to carry out the orders of the will. The one area of their moral theology where the Jesuits departed from the Scholastic model was in their insistence on the primacy of the love of God in their spiritual vision: "La clé du système n'est pas la raison mais l'amour" (Stegmann, *Héroïsme* 219). The Ignatian spiritual experience is directed less at the intelligence than at the heart and the imagination. For example, Loyola says that his novices should "practice the seeking of God's presence in all things, . . . in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, and in all their actions. This kind of meditation, which finds God our Lord in all things is easier than raising oneself to the consideration of divine truths which are more abstract" (*Counsels* 43). In this they were in concert with the Augustinian tendency of all moral philosophy during the first fifty years of the seventeenth century (Bénichou 231).

Wherever the Jesuits extended their influence, confession was a hallmark of their strategy. It was a key to the formation of their own priests. The *Spiritual Exercises* involve a twice daily "examen," and a general confession during the first week. Loyola's description of a

spiritual warfare between the retreatant and the devil is derived from the monastic tradition, and he sees confession as the same sort of defeat for the demon which the Desert Fathers had imagined:

When the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasion to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good confessor or to another spiritual person that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun.

(212, 13th Rule for the discernment of spirits)

The Jesuits required weekly confession of their novices. It was important in their schools, and it was vital to their political intrigues. In France, the Jesuits formed an unbroken succession of royal confessors from the reign of Henri III throughout the seventeenth century. They were a power behind the throne, deliberately bending the rules of morality to accommodate their royal clients. Mme de Maintenon complained of the pernicious influence of "confesseurs à l'eau douce" on Louis XIV (Grégoire 72). In his *Histoire des confesseurs des empereurs, des rois, et d'autres princes*, Abbé Grégoire cites this passage from a Jesuit manual which outlines how the laxists deliberately set out to, in H. C. Lea's words, "conquer by yielding" (3:583): "Dans la direction de la conscience des grands nos confesseurs suivront le sentiment des auteurs qui font la conscience plus libre, contre le sentiment des autres religieux afin que les quittant, ils veuillent entièrement dépendre de notre direction et de nos conseils" (39). The Jesuits actively sought control over the consciences of the "grands" by the use of their casuistry. By offering easy absolution and accommodating arrangements between Christianity and the courtly aristocratic ethos, they sought to extend their influence over the elite. There is no need to renounce completely one's worldly ways, they said, just confess them to a casuist. The repressive side of the law disappears, but power is still enacted by the obligation to confess. No need for remorse or guilt, just the necessity to avow. The Jesuits had doubtless understood that pastoral power need not be repressive to be effective; on the contrary, by appearing to suspend a restrictive law, they seemed to be extending liberty and freedom to those who entered their fold willingly. According to Foucault, this is the classic ruse of pastoral power, and it explains

why Western man has submitted so willingly to various practices of the self: because he sees in them an exercise of liberty, not implication in a power structure.

This is another area where we will look for analogies between Corneille's religious milieu and the functioning of confession in his plays. Does he use casuistical rhetoric to reconcile the criminal acts of his heroes with the principles of divine right monarchy, and does the hero sometimes conquer most effectively by appearing to yield?

I am not the first to see a parallel between Corneille and the casuists; several times in his reading of the *Lettres provinciales*, A. J. Krailsheimer mentions Corneille: "The *morale relâchée* imputed to the Jesuits is in many ways the theological counterpart of the ethical codes already seen in Descartes, Corneille, and Retz, and it is an open question how far the connection was causal" (102). And further: "Corneille's heroes 'dirigent l'intention' when they look back on their actions, and seek to make self-interest respectable by identifying it with the common good, as expressed in social demands" (108).

We will pursue these questions especially in *Horace* and *Le Cid*, where the notorious casuistical subjects of dueling and homicide receive the kind of lenient treatment that so incensed Pascal. Horace, after all, kills his brother-in-law and then his sister, yet is pardoned by the king of Rome and preserves his status as national hero. Rodrigue kills the count in a duel with no remorse other than over the loss of his mistress. Both of these acts were expressly forbidden by most orthodox moral theologians, but there were casuists willing to allow dueling and homicide in certain cases to preserve aristocratic honor. Corneille's similar favorable treatment of these issues will invite comparison with the science of his Jesuit masters.

The other model for asceticism and confession in Corneille's life is the *Imitation of Christ*. It was a favorite devotional work of the author's all his life, and he translated it into French verse between 1651 and 1656. One is struck in reading his translation by the similar language and atmosphere between this classic of *devotio moderna* and Corneille's theater. This is due in part to the theatrical style of Corneille's translation, but it also results from the fact that the author's theater is inspired by some of the same moral principles and mental structures to be found in the *Imitation*. Certain spiritual and psychological topoi found in the stage productions are extrapolations of the science of the cloister.

André Stegmann speaks of "profondes analogies" between the translation and the plays and of a similar "démarche intérieure du

héros"; he concludes: "C'est dans l'*Imitation* que l'on trouve la meilleure définition de l'héroïsme Cornélien" (*Héroïsme* 324). I have chosen a line from the *Imitation* as the epigraph for this chapter on Corneille because it uses the same sort of architectural metaphor for the spiritual life which underlies the invention of the confessional. The passage comes from book 3, section 38, dealing with methods for exercising free will and maintaining "le dedans vraiment libre et tranquille." The narrative voice, which is that of Christ, advises the reader, when faced with a moral dilemma, to retreat into the tabernacle like Moses. The tent in the desert is replaced by a recently invented domestic space, the "cabinet":³

Entre, entre à son exemple au cabinet du coeur
Et pour tirer de moi le conseil nécessaire
Du zèle en tes besoins redouble la ferveur.

A recent compartmentalization of domestic life suggests a new spiritual reification, "le coeur" as a private chamber where God gives secret advice and rouses the emotions. For the Cornelian hero, this retreat into the private room of the heart is just as decisive as it is for the spiritual man, and it is rendered possible by a similar demarcation of space. For the translator of the *Imitation*, the stage figures the "cabinet du coeur." By the magic of the proscenium stage, the spectator is allowed to peer into the private confines of the hero's heart. Alone on stage, or in the company of a trusted confidant, he reveals his inner being, unaware that his privacy is being violated.

The walls of the conventional palace setting enclose the hero and project the form of his inner space. The simultaneous presence of the spectators, separated by the invisible fourth wall, heightens the division between private meditations and public life. The "cabinet du coeur" as a moral space is replicated by the stage, and we become privileged witnesses to the inner and outer drama of the hero as he tries to mediate between the private certainties of conscience and the demands and truths of history.

The complement to this private watchfulness over the soul is the confessing of the noble heart to others: "Pauline a l'âme noble et parle à coeur ouvert" (463). Having attained interior illumination about the self, the hero must bare his or her inner soul no matter how trying the circumstances. The confession of the self is part of the process whereby the hero attains full self-knowledge and carries out his mission. The

others within the play must also become spectators of the heroic heart as private truth becomes transparent communication in the idealized community.

Among critics, Jean Starobinski has shed the most light on this drive of the Cornelian protagonist toward self-revelation. In his essay "Sur Corneille," he writes at length about the hero's desire to make a spectacle of his whole life, preferably at court. Ultimately this involves revealing the hidden struggles of his interior life and the private victories over the self. As with confession in the spiritual life, the actual process of avowal helps achieve heroic status. Emerging victorious in the trial of self-statement, the hero presents a glorious and seemingly unified spectacle of the ego:

Tout se passe comme si l'âme héroïque ne pouvait supporter à la longue la division du manifeste et du caché, comme s'il lui était intolérable de vivre en état de dédoublement; l'effort par lequel elle réprime ce qu'elle ne consent pas à laisser paraître culmine dans un acte à la fois destructeur et unificateur. Le héros peut alors à nouveau se montrer tout entier, une fois consumé en lui tout l'inavouable, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui était autre que son plus haut moi. Ainsi l'intériorité héroïque vise sa propre destruction et triomphe lorsqu'elle s'ouvre sur une extériorité totale. La conscience ne peut s'arrêter au déchirement secret; elle s'immole et livre son sacrifice en spectacle à l'univers. Dans ce spectacle où l'antithèse du dedans et du dehors est abolie, l'être et le paraître se réconcilient définitivement. (63)

For Starobinski, the hero achieves a semiotic resolution, the outside finally revealing and conforming to the inside. Confession would be the dramatization of the passage of the hidden signified from inside to out. Whether or not this process is seen as a successful closing of the gap between inner meaning and outside expression is open to further discussion. In the plays of Corneille, Racine, and Molière, there are heroic, tragic, and comic versions of this avowal. The recurrent Cornelian figure for this activity, "parler à coeur ouvert," suggests something other than Starobinski's abolition of an antithesis. In Corneille, the opening of the heart is rather a more violent process reminiscent of the monks' confessional "agon." It is expressed in images of combat, political struggle, medical purgation, and, finally, martyrdom. The coherence of the heroic self is bought at the price of a physical and

retorical opening up that suspends its meaning on the favorable reading of an omniscient spectator. Grandeur and illusion of the heroic self which, in its supreme act of self-revelation, defers meaning to those empowered to decide. Heroism turns out to be, not the imposition of private, conscious meaning, but rather an opening up to hermeneutic authority. Ultimately, the hero must become part of the Legend; he surrenders his private signification to the reading and writing of sacred or national History.

The paradox I am suggesting is that the hero's triumphant revelation of the heart conceals subjection to a preordained repertory of images that he will recognize as self, which ties the hero to a perpetual discursive self-creation where his only true integrated self, outside and inside, is a spoken self, where heroism is fully realized only when the act is completed by the verbalization of the heart. Like the founding proposition of Descartes's philosophical "je," similarly conceived in the privacy of the "poêle," Corneille's heroic "moi" exists only "toutes les fois que je la prononce" . . . and that *they* concur.

MÉDÉE: "JE NE ME REPENS PAS DE VOUS AVOIR TRAH"

In his *Discours de la tragédie*, written in 1660, Corneille prided himself on having invented a new kind of moralistic, didactic tragedy, unknown to the ancients, based on "la punition des méchantes actions et la récompense des bonnes" (832). For Corneille and many of his contemporaries, Aristotelian catharsis meant "la purgation des passions," and it was thought that this was best accomplished by the spectacle of the passions leading to crime and punishment. Most modern scholars have since concluded that *catharsis* is a medical term meaning a homeopathic cure in which the ingestion of small amounts of a toxic agent or pathogen teaches the body to repulse a foreign substance. Applied to the theater, this modern view of the word means that during the course of a play the spectator indulges in his pathological instincts and is thereafter relieved of forbidden desires. But in Corneille's day, any suggestion that the spectator shared in the criminal passions of the dramatis personae was grounds for condemning the whole theatrical enterprise. It was inconceivable that controlled participation in forbidden impulses could serve the civilizing process. Those who made a moral defense of the theater adopted a line of reasoning like

Corneille's. Racine, for example, says in the preface to *Phèdre* that in his play "les moindres fautes sont sévèrement punies."

However, Corneille's first tragedy, *Médée* (1635), does not conform to this formula, since its eponymic heroine commits the repugnant crimes of fratricide and infanticide yet escapes unpunished. Already in the dedicatory comments of 1639, one senses Corneille's unease with the amoral content of the play as he tries to bring it within the scope of his moralizing conception of the theater. He contends that the spectator does not have to see Medea punished; a faithful representation of her crimes suffices to inspire "quelque horreur"; the audience understands instinctively that these horrendous acts "ne sont pas à imiter" (173).

However limited this didactic theory of tragic catharsis, Corneille's comments do point to the singularity of *Médée* within his oeuvre. It is my contention that this is not the result of unpunished wickedness but rather the failure of a fundamental moral mechanism in Corneille—confession. Neoclassical tragedy no less than ancient tragedy was not based on straightforward moral didacticism. It is not a melodrama in which the good triumph unproblematically over the bad. Ancient tragedy involved catharsis, properly understood as homeopathic cure, and neoclassical drama makes use of a similar morally ambivalent ceremony—confession—which legitimizes the representation of criminal desire and allows for a more sophisticated adjudication of crime than "la punition des méchantes actions."

Médée stands apart from the rest of Corneille's plays because the criminal impulses of its main character are not mitigated by avowal, and the play conforms more to the ancient tragic model than to Corneille's Jesuitical sense of morality. There are other unpunished criminals in Corneille's theater, as we shall see, but they become morally acceptable by submitting to the civilizing process of confession. Medea stands in contrast to a number of confessing heroes and especially heroines: L'Infante, Chimène, Horace, Cinna, Pauline. She makes a *defiant* avowal or opening of the heart, but it is an anticonfession, a refusal to put her desire at the disposal of the city.

Médée is Corneille's only pure tragedy because it represents a total failure of society to deal with crime and guilt. The political structure of Corinth is destroyed because it cannot resolve the issue of the original sins of its would-be king, Jason. An attempt is made to purify Jason by dissociating him from his murderous wife and accomplice, Medea,

who alone as *pharmakos* is made to bear the guilt. But she appears at the end of the play, like an avenging demon, to administer poetic justice. Jason pays with the loss of his own children for betraying Medea and trying to avoid the guilt he shares for the murder and mutilation of her brother.

The attempted exile of Medea is based on the archaic concept of defilement and ritualistic purification. Paul Ricoeur says that defilement is the most primitive representation of evil, since "impurity is measured not by imputation to a responsible agent but by the objective violation of an interdict" (*Symbolism* 27). Exile is the characteristic expression of this system, since it removes the objectively "impure" element from the city. It also signifies expulsion from the legal space of the polis; outside the city, the banished criminal is no longer protected by the law and may be killed with impunity. The idea of exile contains within it the seed of a higher conception of justice, since it refers to human laws.⁴ But in *Médée*, responsibility is not fairly meted out. An attempt is made to separate Jason legally and ritualistically from the crimes committed on his behalf by dissolving his marriage with Medea and exiling her. The decree of banishment does in some sense succeed, since Medea will indeed leave the city, but not before exacting a terrible revenge and destroying the Corinthian dynasty.

Confession is the Judeo-Christian mechanism for dissipating evil. The cycle of crime and vengeance is interrupted by the verbal purification of the guilty. The community can reopen its gates to the soul exiled by sin. Unlike Oedipus's and Medea's exile, that of Jehovah's people can come to an end. A merciful God hears the confession of a contrite heart and relents. The verbalization of the heart gives man a second chance against the defilements of his past. The absence of this ritual contributes in a fundamental way to the anomalous character of *Médée* in Corneille's work. The play is a tragic prologue to a heroic theater founded on the mediating power of confession. Medea's unrepentant status at the end of the play, "Je ne me repens pas de vous avoir trahi," signifies the triumph of evil over the city and the failure of any confessional apparatus that might contain her.

In a sense, the spiritual voyage of the Cornelian hero begins, as Dante's did, in hell. Medea, the first incarnation of the tragic hero, would not be out of place in the Florentine master's *Inferno*. When she first appears on stage and we catch our first diacritical glimpse of her soul, we are in familiar spiritual company. In her famous opening speech, "Souverains protecteurs des lois de l'hyménée," she invokes

the powers of the Underworld to take revenge on Jason. The details of the portrait reveal a mixture of ancient and more recent Christian elements. Medea calls upon the torturing demonesses of hell, her "fières soeurs," to leave momentarily their "cachots" where they "gênez les âmes" to come to her aid. Instead of the sacred "cabinet du coeur," Medea's psyche is a demonic "cachot."

Where Euripides' heroine invokes "Great Zeus, Lady Themis . . . Queen Hecate" (49), and Seneca's sorceress details the recipe for Creusa's poisoned robe, Corneille's Medea invokes a more Dantesque cohort: "Filles de l'Achéron, pestes, larves, furies" (210). "Gênez" and "cachot" are fourteenth- and sixteenth-century lexemes, respectively, and the vision of demons at work on the souls of the damned is decidedly medieval, not Greek or Roman. "Larves" has a Latin origin and a venerable past in medieval demonology; "peste" entered the French language in the fifteenth century. Medea is as much the contemporary of the Loudun possession trials as she is the enchantress of Greek legend.

The one quality she possesses that marks her as a precursor of the hero is her "grande âme" and her ability to commit herself entirely to one cause. Medea is the heroic ego in its primitive, demonic form, powerfully narcissistic and full of the terrible fantasies of earliest childhood. The tragedy marks the painful discovery of self through the experience of the lost object. Before the betrayal, Medea had cathected all of her libido, powerfully represented as magical powers, to Jason. The tragic couple form a strange reversal of what Freud calls the "normal" type of relation between an "anaclitic" male overestimating the female object and impoverishing his own ego, and the "narcissistic" female seeking a lover who will mirror her own adoration of self. Here it is Jason who seduces female admirers by the power of his own narcissism.⁵

Medea has totally surrendered her own ego-libido to Jason, but his betrayal triggers a powerful and painful return to herself. Like a stretched rubber band, object-libido snaps back into her own ego giving rise to the frenetic "Moi, dis-je et c'est assez" (321). Freud describes this furious return of libido to the ego as characteristic of schizophrenia and other excessively narcissistic states:⁶

The question arises: What is the fate of the libido when withdrawn from external objects in schizophrenia? The megalomania characteristic of these conditions affords a clue here. It has doubt-

less come into being at the expense of the object-libido. The libido withdrawn from the outer world has been directed on to the ego, giving rise to a state which we may call narcissism. But the megalomania itself is no new phenomenon; on the contrary, it is, as we know, an exaggeration and plainer manifestation of a condition which had already existed previously. This leads us to the conclusion that the narcissism which arises when libidinal cathexes are called in away from external objects must be conceived of as a secondary form, superimposed upon a primary one that is obscured by manifold influences. (14:74-75)

Medea has been betrayed by the patriarchal "lois de l'hyménée." Hitherto content to leave her ego invested in the image of Jason and to play the role of perpetuator of that image as mother, her impending exile has forced her to reconstruct her ego, which she does by unleashing the demonic forces of primitive narcissism. Instead of normal ego development, which involves abandoning primitive narcissism in favor of "displacement of libido to an ego-ideal imposed from without," the play represents a tragic destruction of the ego-ideal and an affirmation of the "megalomania" and "omnipotence of thought" of primitive narcissism and schizophrenia.

Freud says that normally the conscience watches over the ego and forces it to strive toward the ego-ideal: "For that which prompted the person to form an ego-ideal over which his conscience keeps guard, was the influence of parental criticism conveyed to him by the medium of the voice" (14:76). But from the beginning, the pact struck with Medea was not based on the repressive voice of conscience and the imposition of an ego-ideal. Jason is "sans conscience" (13); to secure the Golden Fleece he had to "cajoler Médée" (36), and elsewhere he says of his conquest, "Je conjurai Médée" (52). On the psychological and sociological level, civilization is founded on a solicitation of the passions, a "conjuring up" as Jason says. The conscience hears not only the critical parental voice but also the call to desire: "Viens ça, vers le Père." The problem is that Medea will not submit her desire to the regime of lack and the Father; her desire is immediate and productive.

Medea spells this out clearly enough to Créon, explaining how the force of her desire was necessary to carry out the Argonauts' heroic task:

Si lors à mon devoir mon *désir* limité
Eût conservé ma gloire et ma fidélité,

Si j'eusse eu de l'horreur de tant d'énormes fautes,
 Que devenaient Jason, et tous vos Argonautes?
 Sans moi, ce vaillant chef, que vous m'avez ravi,
 Fût péri le premier, et tous l'auraient suivi.
 Je ne me repens point d'avoir par mon adresse
 Sauvé le sang des Dieux et la fleur de la Grèce.

(431–38)

The heroine refuses to abandon the productive force of her desire; she envisages one last "chef-d'oeuvre" (253), which turns out to be the poisoned robe, the "don fatal" given to Créuse. This artistic work of primary process and primary production bursts into flames at the end of the play, consuming Jason's children, wife, and father-in-law—a final physical message of Medea's unrepentant desire, which would not deliver itself up verbally to the paternal order.

Créon had attempted to abrogate the pact with Medea's desire through exile: "Va purge mes Etats d'un monstre tel que toi" (380). And Jason displays tragic hubris by thinking he can conveniently dissociate himself from Medea's desire. The play attempts to draw a line between the criminal sorceress and the state. Immediately following Medea's defiant "Moi dis-je," her attendant counters with the image of society: "un roi fort de tant de sujets" (327). Medea rejects this association of subjects; she is the unrepentant, the unanalyzable schizophrenic who rejects the order of subjectivity and the king. The rulers of Corinth hope to save the state from its dangerous alliance with amoral desire. Créon hopes that marriage and exile will establish "et dedans et dehors une profonde paix" (520). But the plan backfires, and the play ends on the note of a futile witch-hunt as Jason dies, vainly hoping that the gods "peuvent de la sorcière achever le supplice" (1626).

The tragic sense of the play is compounded by the feeling that the catastrophic outcome might have been avoided if the crimes of the past had been acknowledged and guilt dealt with justly. Medea seems to have an intuition of how desire and guilt will be handled in the future. We sense that she might have been recuperated by a more subtle subjective apparatus. She protests the injustice of her bearing all the guilt and, arguing as a jurist, indicts Jason on the charge of conspiracy: "Tu présumes en vain de t'en mettre à couvert: / Celui-là fait le crime à qui le crime sert" (859–60).

Elsewhere in the play there is another incidental reference to confession, but here also it serves only to point out the questionable good faith of the characters involved. In a scene that is similar to Pauline

confessing to Sèvere, Créuse explains to an angry Aegée why she has chosen Jason over him: "Souvent je ne sais quoi qu'on ne peut exprimer / Nous surprend, nous emporte, et nous force d'aimer" (635–36). But unlike Pauline, Créuse has chosen passionate love over esteem, and the confession, instead of mollifying Aegée, only angers him: "Que me sert cet aveu d'une erreur volontaire?" (649). To which Créuse replies: "Je ne veux plus, Seigneur, me confesser coupable" (651). She then claims that political reason and a desire to remain close to her father were her real motives, but neither the spectator nor Aegée is convinced by these arguments, since she has already declared quite openly her passionate interest in Jason. On a smaller scale, this scene reflects the same dysfunction of confessional discourse which is a key factor in the tragic pattern of the play. Neither the original sins of the state nor the passions of a princess can be successfully mediated by confession in this play. Desire remains stubbornly attached to its immediate objects; Medea will not cease in the production of her violent desire, and Créuse will let nothing come between herself and Jason. Both refuse the discourse of confession, and both are fittingly united by the destructive masterpiece of Medea's desire, the "présent déceptif" (997). Corneille takes pains to inculcate Créuse in this regard. Early in the play she is presented as coveting Medea's robe as much as Jason himself as object: "J'en eus presque envie aussitôt que de vous" (588). In dying she speaks of "l'ardeur qui me dévore et que j'ai méritée" (1385). It is the same recalcitrant, unanalyzed female desire that unites the two rivals for Jason's love and consumes itself on the tragic victims at the end of the play. Irrespective of the inconstant and narcissistic object, Jason, desire itself burns forth for the first and last time in Corneille's theater in its immediate materiality; henceforth it will be mediated by confessional discourse as the burning flesh gives way to talking hearts.

LE CID: "RODRIGUE, AS-TU DU COEUR?"

The legend of El Cid (Arabic *sayyid*, "lord") grew up around the figure of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, an eleventh-century Castilian warrior who captured the Muslim city of Valencia. The first literary celebration of his exploits was the *Poéma de Mio Cid*, written around 1207 (Fletcher). Later, he became the model of chivalry and the patron of the Reconquest, despite the fact that he had fought with the Moors as much as against them (Kamen 2). Starting in the fourteenth century, a new

element appeared in the chronicles of the Cid: his marriage to Ximena, daughter of a man he had killed in battle, don Gomez de Gormez. In the early versions of the story, Ximena asks the king to order Rodrigo to marry her as recompense for the loss of her father. In the *romances* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ximena seeks justice from the king but accepts immediately and without protest his order to marry a man whose sword is practically still wet with her father's blood. As the role of women in feudal society began to evolve, the plot of the story was changed to attenuate the moral scandal of murder followed by marriage. In Guillén de Castro's *Las Mocedades del Cid* (1618), Rodrigo and Ximena are in love *before* the duel, so both protagonists are faced with a conflict between love and honor. As Reynier comments, Ximena is no longer "une fille résignée ou calculatrice" but "une personne morale" (78).

There are numerous colorful episodes from de Castro's version which Corneille suppresses: Rodrigo receiving his spurs from the infanta, the meeting of the council to choose a governor, the "test scene" in which Rodrigo's father bites his son's thumb to stir up his anger, the duel itself, which in the Spanish play is fought right in front of the distraught Ximena. De Castro also stages the battle scene between Rodrigo and the Moors, and his play contains a miracle episode, typical of medieval legends, in which Rodrigo gives his coat to a leper who turns out to be St. Lazarus. Corneille eliminates all of this superfluous material to focus on the interior disposition of Chimène and Rodrigue. He has recast the medieval epic as a heroic trial of passion and self-statement. Instead of the physical provocation of the Spanish play's father, the Cornelian father challenges his son with the fundamental heroic question: "Rodrigue, as-tu du coeur?" Literally he means "courage," but as he himself will learn, the force that inspires Rodrigue is more than warrior courage. Heroism is fueled by desire, which is produced in the heart and sublimated through speech. Don Diègue's question is at the origin of classical civilization: Can a rhetoric of the speaking heart be developed which exhibits and controls desire in a socially acceptable way? Will desire forgo its terrible immediacy as seen in *Médée* and learn the language of lack and displacement?

The first confessant we encounter in the play is the infanta. Being of royal blood, she can only marry a king, but the object of her desire is the mere nobleman, Rodrigue. The way she overcomes this conflict between duty and desire sets an example that will be followed throughout the play: she opens her heart to her lady-in-waiting,

Léonor. She seeks relief from the mounting pressure of a repressed conflict: "Ma tristesse redouble à la tenir secrète / Ecoute, écoute enfin comme j'ai combattu" (78-79). She then details the power of her passion ("mon coeur est embrasé") and her generous overcoming of an unsuitable love by giving Rodrigue to Chimène. The same fiery metaphors for love are used here as were employed by Medea: "Et j'allumai leurs feux" (104), but these fires have been tamed by this cathartic opening of the heart and submission to the paternal order: "Et je me dis toujours qu'étant fille de roi" (99). The infanta's love remains a metaphorical flame that has been safely constrained, and her self-statement situates her within the royal, genealogical chain. Her "je me dis" is the antithesis of Medea's schizophrenic "Moi-dis-je, et c'est assez." The opening exploration of the infanta's heart also shows us that the fire that burns between Chimène and Rodrigue takes its source in this generous gift. It is a legitimized, frustrated fire of renunciation, the unconsummated desire of an other.

The next conflicts between desire and civilization to be mediated by confession are the twin dilemmas of Rodrigue and Chimène. Rodrigue has killed a man in an illicit duel, and Chimène continues to feel passionate love for her father's murderer. But both of these issues will be resolved by the *cor ad cor* conversation between the lovers in act 3, scene 4, and finally by the "inquisition" of Chimène by the king at the end of the play.

Both illicit desires receive a favorable hearing. Rodrigue refuses to disavow the duel, and Chimène will not eradicate the scandalous love from her heart. By a laxist treatment of the issues involved, verbalization of the "crimes" provides an avenue for discovering meritorious motives behind apparent sins; evil is mediated and desire recuperated for the good of society.

As the scene begins, Chimène has just revealed to Elvire that she still loves Rodrigue: "Je l'avoue" (846) and that for honor's sake she must seek his death. No sooner are these words out than Rodrigue suddenly appears. He has overheard the last words and only missed the avowal of love by seconds. Chimène gasps: "Rodrigue devant moi!" (852). For a moment, Rodrigue occupies the place of voyeuristic spectator, and the play seems to suggest my analogy between confessional and stage. The sudden appearance of Rodrigue sends a shiver through the audience and reawakens the fantasy of the unconscious being watched over by the conscience. The scene is set for an in-depth probing of the protagonists' hearts.

The first issue to be dealt with is Rodrigue's murder of the count. Both ecclesiastical and civil authorities condemned the duel. At the insistence of Richelieu, Louis XIII had signed an edict against dueling in 1626 with the death penalty for offenders (Reynier 249). Twice in the play itself, the king takes exception to his subjects fighting without his authority and only forgives Rodrigue after his victory over the Moors (2.6, 4.5).

Among the casuists, the question of the duel received diverse treatment. The stricter among them condemned the practice: "Les peines de ceux qui se battent en duel sont: l'excommunication réservée au pape, l'infamie perpétuelle, la privation de la sépulture ecclésiastique . . ." (Pontas). However, certain Jesuits found a way of justifying duels. Père Airault, one of Pascal's targets in the *Lettres provinciales*, had this to say about the subject:

Si vous me voulez ravir l'honneur en me donnant un soufflet ou un coup de bâton, je puis l'empêcher par la force des armes; donc la même défense est permise, quand vous voulez me faire la même injure avec la langue, ne pouvant l'éviter autrement qu'en vous tuant. . . . Il faudrait pourtant avertir le calomniateur afin de l'engager à cesser ses calomnies, et s'il ne le voulait pas, il ne serait pas à propos de le tuer publiquement, à cause du scandale, mais en secret. (qtd. in Amann 45)

Rodrigue follows this sort of reasoning—even the very words—in justifying the duel to Chimène: "Tu sais comme un soufflet touche un homme de coeur" (875). But to get beyond the impasse of the vendetta system and the "rigoureux point d'honneur," Rodrigue delves deeper into his heart to explain his crime. By a process akin to the Jesuitical "direction of intention," he re-creates his mental disposition at the time of the killing: "Je t'ai fait une offense, et j'ai dû m'y porter / Pour effacer ma honte, et pour te mériter" (895–96). This is not the same version of the event arrived at during the "stances," where Rodrigue's final motivation in fighting the duel was to preserve his "gloire" and save his family honor. Although in verse 324 he had realized that Chimène could not love someone unwilling to defend paternal honor ("J'attire ses mépris en ne me vengeant pas"), he certainly did not go into battle "pour te mériter," as he now suggests to Chimène. In the "stances," Rodrigue had made his decision by a logic of elimination: Chimène must be sacrificed, but "sauvons du moins l'honneur." The

recourse to a fictional reconstruction of the event allows him to confess his love as an equal motive in the killing.

Is this pure bad faith on his part? Perhaps direction of intention anticipates the psychoanalytic concept of overdetermination. Acts are committed for a host of contradictory reasons, conscious and unconscious, and Rodrigue's casuistical confession allows the deeper, more paradoxical motivations for his act to come to the surface. At some level, desire for Chimène did dictate his act. The surface appearance of submission to paternal law hides an equally powerful Oedipal design. It is by killing a father that Rodrigue shows himself worthy of Chimène. Perhaps this is what is most authentic in Rodrigue's confession and what speaks most convincingly to Chimène, provoking on her part a similar declaration of love. Among the primitive forces that Rodrigue's father invoked when he asked his son if he had a heart was this sentiment of violence against the father. Rodrigue's love is declared in the ambivalent language of transgression and submission to the paternal law.

In this confessional scene, a son and a daughter have reached an entente; while reiterating the paternal code of honor, each has revealed his heart to the other. Rodrigue manages to convey that his murder is a sign of his love, and likewise, Chimène pledges obedience to the point of honor but also gives Rodrigue verbal confirmation of her love: "Va, je ne te hais point" (963). A first step has been taken in alleviating the tragic conflict provoked by the vendetta system.

The gruesome oracle of the father's talking wounds is superseded by the confessional discourse of the children. Before the encounter with Rodrigue, Chimène had evoked the paternal body language that had her in its fatal thrall:

Son sang sur la poussière écrivait mon devoir;
Ou plutôt sa valeur en cet état réduite
Me parlait par sa plaie, et hâtait ma poursuite;
Et, pour se faire entendre au plus juste des rois,
Par cette triste bouche elle empruntait ma voix.

(676-80)

This is the same sort of guilty writing and corporeal language that is used in the Judeo-Christian tradition as an image of man's birthright of sin in the flesh. Here, it is a sign of the cycle of violence and revenge. In the play, as in the tradition, guilty writing can be alleviated by ver-

balization. In the end it is not this "triste bouche" which the king hears but rather the mouth that avows love for Rodrigue.

"Avouer par la bouche"

It is Chimène's avowals that sustain the action of the play and ultimately resolve the tragic conflict. Her admission to Rodrigue gives him the inspiration he needs to defeat the Moors and earn his own forgiveness from the king. There is a similar forced confession of love before the duel with don Sanche. Faced with the emotional blackmail of Rodrigue, who threatens to let himself be killed, Chimène admits: "Adieu: ce mot lâché me fait rougir de honte" (1557). And, finally, at the end of the play, Chimène's unwilling confession to the king allows him to pass judgment and put an end to the tragic vendetta. The inquisition of Chimène is a structural constant in the play; it defines in an essential way the peculiar heroic erotic that Corneille has created, and it allows the king to intervene as arbiter of the truth and desire of his subjects.

Octave Nadal has commented on this aspect of the rapport between the two lovers: "Il [Rodrigue] joue le rôle de tortionnaire vis à vis de sa victime, qu'il tourmente jusqu'à ce qu'il ait obtenu de sa bouche l'aveu qu'elle est vaincue par l'amour. Ce procédé inquisitorial, conduit avec délice, n'est certes pas le fait de la tendresse, mais celui de l'amour propre et de l'égoïsme amoureux" (171-72). The methods used by Rodrigue and later by don Fernand are inquisitorial, but the effects that Nadal describes ("amour propre," "égoïsme") do not satisfactorily explain all of the nuances of inquisition.

By emphasizing Rodrigue's cruelty and egotism, Nadal is suggesting that the inquisition scene results in the same sort of egotistical victory as a duel—Chimène is "vaincue par l'amour." This is only partially true. One can conceive of Rodrigue's victory here as an erotic conquest akin to his military exploits, but the avowal of love that concludes it is not the same as a military defeat.

Let us first examine the similarities. Rodrigue does wage a sort of psychological and rhetorical warfare against Chimène. He appears suddenly in her apartment in a move similar to his nocturnal ambush against the Moors. To heighten the shock, he is carrying the murder weapon. He reveals that he was obliged to kill her father, that he would do it again, that his gesture was necessary to remain worthy of her. Is he suggesting that her high standards in some way contributed to her

father's death? Maybe. He then provokes Chimène by asking her to vent her hatred and kill him with the sword. He seems intent on pushing her to the limit just to make her show that she doesn't hate him and in fact conserves feeling for him in the bottom of her heart. She is tricked into admitting that she will seek his death, but not out of hatred. This is the tacit admission of love that Rodrigue has been seeking. He has overcome Chimène's resistance and forced her to verbalize her passion.

There is an undeniable element of aggression and pleasurable cruelty on the part of Rodrigue. The primitive version of sexuality as masculine conquest is referred to, but Nadal is wrong to say that it is all done for Rodrigue's "amour propre." Chimène's avowal is not the concession of a defeated duelist, and Rodrigue's reaction is not the vain exultation of a victor. To confess is not simply to concede.

The image of Rodrigue as cruel inquisitor is more suggestive, but Nadal does not explore all of the angles. He is certainly right to mention the potential for sadistic pleasure in such a scene. Here one is reminded of the auto-da-fé in *Candide*. Cunégonde is horrified to see Candide tortured publicly, but cannot deny the sensual appeal of the spectacle: "Je vous vis dépouillé tout nu; ce fut là le comble de l'horreur, de la consternation, de la douleur, du désespoir. Je vous dirai avec vérité que votre peau est encore plus blanche et d'un incarnat plus parfait que celui de mon capitaine des Bulgares" (153). This sort of pleasure is not entirely foreign to the inquisitional scenes in the *Cid*. Rodrigue as well as the spectator derives a certain pleasure in torturing the truth out of Chimène. It is also evident that Chimène is an accomplice in this game. She blushes, she protests, but where does shame end and pleasure begin? Corneille's critics were not completely off the mark in calling her a "fille dénaturée."

But cruelty and pleasure are not the only dimensions of a forced confession. Christianity has imbued avowal with a sacred aura. It is a special epiphany of the Truth and a promise of healing. Augustine says: "Thou art there in their heart, in the heart of those that confess to Thee" (65). When the lover's discourse invokes the ceremony of avowal, another register beyond cruelty and pleasure is attained. Love becomes the occasion of insight and healing. Chimène's avowal is a "miracle d'amour," not just a humiliating defeat or a sadistic spectacle for Rodrigue.

For the play to reach its conclusion Rodrigue must work out his

own restitution for the evil of the duel, and the king must sound the heart of Chimène. Like Rodrigue, don Fernand will subject Chimène to a veritable inquisition, and here the tactics he uses invite comparison with those used by the historical Inquisition. The king decides to test Chimène's real sentiments concerning Rodrigue, "Je vais l'éprouver" (1336). He lies to her by reporting that Rodrigue has perished at the hands of the Moors. She faints, and don Diègue tells the king that he has the proof of her love: "Sa douleur a trahi les secrets de son âme" (1345).

Such tactical lies were used by the Inquisition to pry the truth from heretics. As Francisco Peña writes in the *Manuel des inquisiteurs* (1578):

La ruse dont le seul but est de tromper est toujours défendue et n'a rien à faire dans la pratique du droit; mais le mensonge que l'on fait judiciairement et au bénéfice du droit, du bien commun et de la raison, celui-là est parfaitement louable. A plus forte raison, celui que l'on fait pour détecter les hérésies, déraciner les vices et convertir les pécheurs. Que l'on songe au jugement de Salomon! (133)

Chimène initially denies the evidence of her fainting, but another mistaken belief in Rodrigue's death produces the final avowal. Seeing the sword brought back from the duel with don Sanche, and assuming that her lover is dead, she declares: "Eclate, mon amour, tu n'as plus rien à craindre. . . . Sire, il n'est plus besoin de vous dissimuler / Ce que tous mes efforts ne vous ont pu celer" (1709, 1723–24). Don Diègue observes that Chimène has been forced to "avouer par sa bouche" (1742). The avowal is irrevocable; when she learns that Rodrigue is indeed alive, she can not retract her declaration.

The king passes judgment; his justice dispenses Chimène from the "point d'honneur" and the shame of loving Rodrigue: "Ma fille, il ne faut point rougir d'un si beau feu" (1763). Confession has discovered the truth, absolved guilt, and united the true hearts. He commands Chimène to accept Rodrigue as her husband at an indefinite future date. For the present, "possédant déjà le coeur de sa maîtresse" (1838), Rodrigue already enjoys the obscure object of his desire, the mythical heart that the king has tricked into confessing itself, the broken heart mourning its lost love: "Eclate, mon amour, tu n'as plus rien à craindre" (1709). Rodrigue will never receive a higher tribute nor possess a

richer treasure than the fragile declaration that he couldn't be present to hear and that the king received in his place. For a moment, death was love's ally, and Chimène's heart broke its honorable silence.

HORACE AND CINNA: ABSOLUTION AND ABSOLUTISM

The recent work of Louis Marin has focused on the eucharistic formula as a cornerstone to both the theory of representation in the Port-Royal grammarians and the political praxis of the court historiographers and artists. In the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port-Royal*, the joint work of Arnauld and Claude Lancelot, the sacramental enunciation "Hoc est corpus meum" is cited several times as an example of how signs fulfill their double role of designation and signification. For Marin, the eucharistic example is the only enunciation that can accomplish both missions of the sign. Only the miraculous divine words can found a theory of language capable of going beyond semiosis and breaking through to the designation of a real presence. For Marin, the consecration formula is the "exemple privilégié du point de vue de la théorie logico-grammaticale" in the *Logique* and the *Grammaire générale* which at the same time presents, accomplishes, and resumes the theory of representation (*Critique* 32).

Similarly, in the political domain, the entire strategy of royal propaganda was based on an analogy to the real presence in the sacrament. Marin demonstrates that the various portraits of the king were based on the eucharistic model. He calls the commemorative medals of Louis XIV "hosties royales" (*Portrait* 147-68).

I wish to show how the "Ego te absolvo" of confession was equally important to absolutism. In the *Instructions théologiques et morales sur les sacrements*, Nicole speculates about why God instituted the sacraments:

- D. Pourquoi Dieu a-t-il voulu établir des Sacremens extérieurs pour nous communiquer ses grâces?
- R. Parce qu'il a voulu qu'en même temps que les Chrétiens lui seroient unis par un culte spirituel, ils fussent aussi unis ensemble, en un corps visible de religion; & qu'il étoit pour cela nécessaire qu'il y eût de la dépendance entre eux, & qu'ils se communiquassent les uns aux autres par des signes extérieurs,

non-seulement les vérités de la foi, mais même la rémission des péchés & les grâces nécessaires à la vie chrétienne. (2)

For Nicole, the sacraments—and he specifically mentions confession here—were instituted to form a “corps visible de religion.” The theory of divine right monarchy was based on an analogous conception of society as a body, that of the king, held together by various rituals and image building.

Here it is the other capacity of the sign within the theory of representation that is valorized: “Figure porte absence et présence, plaisir et déplaisir,” Pascal says in *Pensée* 265. The efficaciousness of confession depends on the sign’s ability to truly “porter absence.” Here representation is invoked to hide the presence of sin. The confessional sign is called upon to stand as the *sigillum* of sin, the sign that seals and conceals. As Nicole says in his *Instructions*, “Tout ce qu’on découvre au Prêtre par un aveu sincère, sera caché à jamais à tous les hommes, . . . et tout ce qu’on lui cache sera découvert à la face de toute la terre” (259).

For the Jansenist theologians, only grace could guarantee that the figure really did indicate absence. This is why they sought to delay absolution: “Que le pécheur qui cherche sérieusement le bien de son âme, ne doit pas souhaiter d’être absous de ses péchés sans délai” (*Instructions* 306). This is also why they continually worried if the formula had really worked: “N’y a-t-il point de marques . . . qui nous puissent donner une juste confiance de la solidité de notre conversion?” (329). These apprehensions made them insist on the disposition of the penitent; Nicole is close to the Protestant position when he affirms, “L’absolution produit la grace dans les âmes à proportion de leurs dispositions” (311). He is at odds with the Council of Trent, which put the emphasis on the power of the formula itself and the authority of the priest to absolve sins. Absolution was important for both rigorists and laxists; the former stressed the need for grace to make it operative, whereas the latter were confident, if not presumptuous, about the performative power of the words.

As with the Eucharist, there were political analogies to the sacrament of penance in the real and imaginary practices of the divine right monarchy. There were times when it was just as important to undo and efface actions as it was to project a presence.

Our subject is the literary representation of confession and absolution, so we again return to Corneille, but, as I discussed in chapter 2, confessional discourse was also an important feature of court society

as it actually functioned. According to the laws of the ancien régime, by an act of "abolition," the king could declare the criminal action of one of his subjects as having not taken place. Legally, this is what happens at the end of *Horace* and *Cinna* (Couton 27). We also see historical instances of the king trying to use confession to rule consciences. Norbert Elias describes the following case:

In demanding subordination and confession of guilt, Henri IV was implacable. He had to be. For example, he first requested the Duc de Biron, who was planning an uprising, to confess his intentions in a confidential meeting between the two, promising him certain forgiveness if he confessed and repented. But when de Biron refused to confess, despite the latter's repeated reminders of services rendered to the king, he had him unceremoniously brought to justice and finally executed. (*Court* 183)

Horace and *Cinna* are dramatizations of the power of absolution. In the first play, the king intervenes at the end of the play to judge a case of homicide. He hears the various accusations and defenses of Horace as well as the accused's own verbal account of the murder; he then weighs the various arguments in casuistical fashion and delivers a verdict. In similar fashion to the *Cid*, a moral dilemma has been resolved by the king's confessing of his subject.

Cinna portrays the foundation of a permanent peace between an absolute king and his rebellious subjects brought about by a pardon of the conspirators and their subsequent repentance and submission to his rule. Confession and absolution are essential attributes of the "roi-prêtre." They are rituals that allow the state to dissociate itself from the evil of its constituent members.⁷ By the pronouncement of the royal *sigillum*, the mystical body of the state erases the sins of its heroes.

Confessional discourse also extends the link between monarch and subject to the depths of the subject's conscience. Corneille imagines a successful synthesis between royal power and pastoral power. It is a fragile balance perhaps achieved completely only in *Cinna*, where Auguste intervenes in time to prevent any crime. The emperor exercises true government by gaining access to his subjects' consciences and hearing their confessions. Rebellion is nipped in the bud, not by repressive force, but by a turning inward and an obligation to reveal

one's thoughts: "Apprends à te connaître, et descends en toi-même. . . . Parle, parle, il est temps" (1517, 1541).

The Case of *Horace*

Corneille had no great affection for the fifth act of *Horace*; he thought that the episode of Camille's murder was a breach of the Aristotelian unity of action and that the last act, "tout en plaidoyers," was an anti-climactic if not dishonorable ending for both the play and its hero (*Examen*). However, he must have felt that the murder of the sister and the subsequent trial of Horace were integral parts of the Roman legend and that his audience expected these events to be treated in his play. His Spanish and Italian predecessors had both included the trial, although Lope de Vega, as concerned with dramatic interest as Corneille, dispatched the trial in a few stanzas. The growing prestige of the monarch in Corneille's plays and the subjective profundity of his theater required a longer and more detailed scene, which, however unsatisfactory from a dramatic standpoint, was necessary to resolve the moral dilemma.

Returning home victorious, carrying the armor of his vanquished brothers-in-law, Horace encounters his sister, the betrothed of Curiace: "Ma soeur, voici le bras qui venge nos deux frères" (1251). Somehow, he expects his grieving sister to share in his glory. She is as devastated by Curiace's death as Horace is drunk with victory.

Horace's tragic mistake is to start a rhetorical battle with Camille that ends in murder and dishonor. He doesn't respect the feminine prerogative of mourning, one of the few real liberties accorded women in a warrior society. Unlike Rodrigue, who offers Chimène the sword of reconciliation and sorrow, Horace ends up using his weapon in a disgraceful act of violence against a woman.

An instructive parallel can be drawn between Horace and Rodrigue returning victorious from battle to confront a grieving woman. One outcome is admirable and the other tragic. This is because Horace is capable only of a rhetorical duel with men that terminates in violence. Ironically, his dispute with Camille follows the same pattern as his face-off with Curiace: tempers rise until Roman patriotism is insulted and violence ensues. Unfortunately, Horace has merely repeated the scenario of his combat with Curiace, and one could legitimately ask whether, at the moment he stabs his sister, he is not somehow

reenacting the duel, because it is Curiace's name that is on his lips as he unleashes the fatal blow: "Va dedans les enfers rejoindre ton Curiace" (1320).

Rodrigue, on the contrary, symbolically offers the sword to Chimène and allows her to unburden her heart. The situation is different in that Chimène is not mourning an "ennemi public" and does not insult Rodrigue's patriotism. But both men have killed an object totally invested by the female egos they confront. For this reason, Horace's intransigent attitude can be meaningfully contrasted with Rodrigue's. The Castilian listens to the anguish of female desire, whereas Horace's only advice to Camille is "songe à mes trophées: / Qu'ils soient dorénavant ton unique entretien" (1277). In *Le Cid*, Rodrigue weathers the storm of Chimène's anger and eventually hears the secret of her undiminished love. A similar reconciliation between Horace and Camille never occurs because the vanquisher of the Curiaces demands that Camille suppress her sentiments: "Tes flammes désormais doivent être étouffées" (1275). When Camille does open her heart according to the Cornelian formula, "Je t'ouvre mon âme" (1279), it only provokes the further ire of Horace. The refusal to hear Camille's avowal of passion for Curiace is the sign of a tragic lack of communication.

What this scene really depicts is a total misapprehension of female desire on the part of Horace. He will not understand the depth of his sister's love for Curiace. The images of the play show us that Camille's love is as terrifying as a nightmare, as mysterious as an oracle, and, finally, as deep as the grave. Horace confronts this "en plus" of female desire as if it were another masculine rival, another "autre soi-même." As in the duel, he seeks to conquer an identity at the other's expense, to assure that only his "soi-même" emerges from the encounter. But what he really accomplishes is an ironic and belated victory for the tragic couple. By killing his sister, he tarnishes his honor and gives her what she really desires at this point: the status of martyr of love. By trying to extinguish his sister's love for Curiace and kill his rival once and for all, he really defeats himself and furnishes his rivals with the occasion to be gloriously united in death and in legend. Only the trial of the fifth act and the restorative power of King Tulle's diacritical judgment can save the hero from disgrace and preserve the play from a truly tragic ending.

After the murder, we are given at least nine different objective evaluations of Horace's act before the king arrives to assume proper authority on this "reserved case." The first qualification of the act is the

perpetrator's own words as he commits it; he speaks of "justice" and "raison." Next, Procule disapproves of Horace's excessive "rigueur" (1325). The elder Horace agrees that Camille merited death, but feels that his son has shamed himself by his action (1416). Horace himself then admits that his "lâcheté" has sullied his noble blood (1425–26). The king then arrives and, after calling Horace's action an "étrange malheur," allows Valère to begin, as it were, the prosecution's case.

"Crime," "coupable," "barbare vainqueur," "souillât la gloire," are some of the terms used by Valère. Then Horace is commanded to speak on his own behalf. He starts his plea by referring to the monarchical principle that the subject is always *de jure* guilty before the king:

Sire, on se défend mal contre l'avis d'un Roi,
Et le plus innocent devient soudain coupable
Quand aux yeux de son prince il paraît condamnable.

(1538–40)

Louis Herland interprets these remarks as expressing "insolence" and "mépris de l'opinion du Roi" (201). André Stegmann, however, has more correctly identified these lines as being "un acte de soumission inconditionnelle" (*Héroïsme* 396). The whole meaning of the trial is that the king, as incarnation of the law (*lex rex*), is alone capable of making the correct judgment.

The monarch enjoys special charisma and powers of judgment which escape the ordinary mortal. *L'Innocence justifiée*, one of many royalist tracts of the 1630s, speaks in these terms of the special graces that illuminated Louis XIII: "Par une présence d'esprit miraculeuse vous trouvez incontinent, sans tourner, le point principal, le centre du cercle et le remède aux affaires les plus épineuses, où vos Ministres, souvent quelque raffinés et consommés qu'ils soient en toutes choses, n'y vont qu'aux atteintes" (qtd. in Thuau 248). This is the sort of elevated insight that Corneille's roi Tulle possesses and that allows him to judge the case of Horace.

In the Roman legend, as recounted by Livy, the king disqualifies himself and allows the people to make the final decision. Corneille's play, however, explicitly rejects the notion that the people could have any insight into the hero's heart: "Horace, ne crois pas que le peuple stupide / Soit le maître absolu d'un renom bien solide," says Horace's father (1711–12). In Corneille's play, the judgment and pardon of Horace are part of the process of royal deification; Tulle indicates that by

rendering justice to men, "un roi se fait un demi-dieu" (1478). In the Roman legend, it is the elder Horace's rhetoric that sways the crowd and convinces them of the inhumanity of putting a national hero to death: Where could he be executed? Inside or outside the walls of the city? Everywhere bears witness to his glory. The hero himself and the king stand silent as the father makes his impassioned plea.

In Corneille, the father makes his speech, but it is to a small closed hearing. It is an opinion the king considers, but finally the decision will rest upon Horace's own words and the king's response to them. Corneille's acquittal depends, not on a public spectacle, but on the king's sacramental power to absolve Horace and, in keeping with the semiotics of confession, to *hide* the sin of the hero: "Qu'elles [les lois] se taisent donc; que Rome *dissimule* / Ce que dès sa naissance elle vit en Romule" (1755-56, emphasis added). As in the Roman legend, Horace's glory outshines his crime, but the rhetorical fashion in which this is established is quite the opposite. The crucial exchange in Corneille takes place in the verbalization of the fault by Horace and the reply to these words.

First the king commands Horace to speak: "Défendez-vous Horace." Here the purpose of confession is not to dispel a mystery or solve a crime but rather to examine the overdeterminations of an act and, by an interpretive tour de force, to direct the intention of Horace most advantageously.

What is also important here is for Horace to confirm the king's justice by his avowal. In both the civil and religious justice from this period, a condemned man would confess his crime publicly, "faire amende honorable," as part of his punishment, *after* the judgment of his guilt. This served to bear public witness to the righteousness of the king's justice and, in some measure, to redeem the condemned man who acknowledged his guilt. Finally, in a psychological sense, Horace must take an active part in the "talking cure" if it is to be effective and he is to be cured of his desire for suicide. The king will base his reply on the very terms that Horace uses, thereby offering an interpretation and a solution to the hero's tragic impasse.

As I have already indicated, Horace starts his avowal by submitting entirely to the king's judgment and acknowledging his guilt. He invites the king to go beyond appearances and discover the hidden truth of his motivations:

Sire, c'est rarement qu'il s'offre une matière
A montrer d'un grand coeur la vertu tout entière

Suivant l'occasion elle agit plus ou moins,
 Et paraît forte ou faible aux yeux de ses témoins.
 Le peuple, qui voit tout seulement par l'écorce
 S'attache à son effet pour juger de sa force.

(1555-60)

Horace declares that at the root of all of his actions are a "vertu" and a "grand coeur" which are invisible to the people but which the king alone can discern. There is a secret entente between hero and monarch which makes the king the only fit judge of this case. By this intimation, Horace surrenders his fate and his meaning to the king. He offers himself up as a sign to be read, a "figure" with its present "écorce" and its absent "coeur" which only the king can see.

Rhetorically, the gambit succeeds; the king takes the cue. He begins his interpretation by saying that all the testimony is taken into account, "toutes vos raisons me sont encore présentes," but his final decision is influenced most heavily by Horace's words, some of which he comments upon literally in his decision.

First, Tulle deftly turns aside the father's defense on the grounds of a "premier mouvement":

Un premier mouvement qui produit un tel crime
 Ne saurait lui servir d'excuse légitime;
 Les moins sévères lois en ce point sont d'accord.

(1735-37)

It is difficult to know exactly what Corneille means by "les moins sévères lois" here. In Livy, the archaic law of the Roman legend is indeed implacable; the parricide was condemned to be bound and beaten to death. But Corneille's vieil Horace invokes certain principles of jurisprudence that would be plausible in the seventeenth century, and Tulle addresses these issues. French customary law contained the notion that the will had to be fully engaged for commission of a crime: "Il n'y a point de crime là où manque l'intention criminelle" (Loysel, art. 791). As I have already mentioned, the casuists were willing to bend homicide laws: duels could be justified; anger and precipitation were legitimate attenuating circumstances. It is my contention that Tulle's judgment follows a pattern of moral latitude in political matters in Corneille which is based on a casuistical, accommodating adjustment between the sacred and *raison d'Etat*.

The king first declares that the "premier mouvement" argument is

not the relevant point. Horace is not absolved because the murder was an involuntary act, but by reference to three key notions that are contained in Horace's own speech:

1. The arm: "Je ne vanterai point les exploits de mon bras" (1573). By this allusion, Horace had called the king's attention to the debt the state owes him, and it is "le bras" that opens Tulle's justification of Horace: "Ce crime . . . part du même bras / Qui me fait aujourd'hui maître de deux Etats" (1740). The synecdochical reduction of Horace to his arm allows the crime to be confused with his heroic exploits; how can one punish the same arm that saved the nation? Horace's victories have established the state itself; he is blessed with "dons que le Ciel fait à peu de personnes" (1752). Since the state owes its very existence to Horace, he is "au-dessus des lois" (1754). His gift is akin to charity; it is the total commitment that frees one from the law.

2. After this argument, Tulle pronounces the absolution itself: "que Rome dissimule / Ce que dès sa naissance elle vit en Romule" (1755–56). Georges Couton says that Tulle here avails himself of an actual provision in the laws of ancien régime France which allowed the king to pronounce the "abolition" of a crime, "une procédure qui permettait par raison d'Etat de considérer un acte comme non advenu" (27).⁸ To our way of thinking, Tulle goes beyond just effacing the crime. After initially stating that the murder "blesse jusqu'aux Dieux," he systematically attenuates Horace's culpability, first, as we have just seen, by placing the hero prior to and above the law, and next by examining Horace's real motive.

This involves a reversal of the cause and effect relationship that the people see in Horace's behavior. The warrior had complained that the people consider only the "effet" of an action and make false assumptions about the motive for heroic actions, thus they would misunderstand the killing of Camille because they can't perceive the real "cause." The king's interpretation establishes the correct cause and effect relationship:

Vis donc, Horace, vis guerrier trop magnanime:
Ta vertu met ta gloire au-dessus de ton crime;
Sa chaleur généreuse a produit ton forfait;
D'une cause si belle il faut souffrir l'effet.

(1759–62)

The apparent crime is excused because as an "effect" it is derived from a virtuous "cause." Again, a metonymic shift, this time by a substitu-

tion of cause for effect, allows the king to save Horace. First, the synecdoche of the arm for the man had made it physically impossible to separate the hero from the criminal; now a metonymic reversal substitutes a cause—"chaleur généreuse"—for an effect: sororicide, the overt fact that the people would have seen, judging only from the outside.

3. This brings us to the third key notion in the decision: Horace's act was not the result of a rash act, a "premier mouvement," but rather a "vertu," which in the terminology of the Scholastics meant an acquired habit. Camille's death resulted from the virtue or habit of patriotism in Horace. He has trained himself to react in certain circumstances, and this is what produced the regrettable but understandable event.

Whether or not one is ready to excuse Horace on this account, and a modern audience is more likely to be repulsed by his conditioned behavior, Tulle's judgment does seem an accurate appraisal of Horace's act. In the murder of his sister, Horace does seem to be following a habitual pattern of behavior, and the key to it seems to be verbal. Horace has trained himself to react to certain words or formulas, when they are pronounced either by himself or by others.

At the center of this verbal constellation is the word *Rome*. When Curiace separates himself from Rome, "Je rends grâces aux Dieux de n'être pas Romain" (481), Horace no longer sees him as a friend. The very fact that Rome has spoken blocks out all further considerations: "Rome a choisi mon bras, je n'examine rien" (598). Finally, the *name* of Rome's adversary produces a complete dissociation and denial of his friend: "Albe vous a nommé je ne vous connais plus" (502). Horace has trained himself to respond to verbal cues; this is the mechanism of his "vertu." When Camille provokes him with "Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment," she sets off a conditioned reflex of "vertu."

Horace's reliance on verbal cues to produce a "virtuous" pattern of behavior brings to mind Descartes's comments on language and the control of the passions. The control of the will is essentially an associative process that Descartes compares to the arbitrary yet habitual link between the phonetic syllables of words and the impressions they produce on the soul:

Encore que chaque mouvement de la glande semble avoir été joint par la nature à chacune de nos pensées dès le commencement de notre vie, on les peut toutefois joindre à d'autres par habitude, ainsi que l'expérience fait voir aux paroles qui excitent des mouvements en la glande, lesquels, selon l'institution de la

nature, ne représentent à l'âme que leur son lorsqu'elles sont pro-férées de la voix, ou la figure de leurs lettres lorsqu'elles sont écrites, et qui, néanmoins, par l'habitude qu'on a acquise en pensant à ce qu'elles signifient lorsqu'on a ouï leur son ou bien qu'on a vu leurs lettres ont coutume de faire concevoir cette signification plutôt que la figure de leurs lettres ou bien le son de leurs syllabes. Il est utile aussi de savoir qu'encore que les mouvements, tant de la glande que des esprits et du cerveau, qui représentent à l'âme certains objets, soient naturellement joints avec ceux qui excitent en elle certaines passions, ils peuvent toutefois par *habitude* en être séparés et joints à d'autres fort différents. (*Passions* 65, emphasis added)

Descartes is confident that a person can train his response to a given sensation or passion in the same way the mind is trained to associate letters and sounds with the things they represent. By repeated training, for example, a soldier can be taught to associate the sensations of battle with courage instead of fear. Language is Descartes's example of what is most arbitrary and programmable in human behavior. Horace's behavior seems to bear this out if I am right in thinking that words provide the real explanation for his virtuous action.

The final note in Tulle's judgment is an appeal to Horace's vital forces: "Vis guerrier trop magnanime" (1759). Let us not forget that Horace was near suicide after his crime, and that without the expedient of the king's absolution, there was no hope for him. He was locked in the private world of his own justifications and intentions; only the king's inquisition can legitimize his intentions and bring him back into the fold. Horace was ready to immolate himself to his egotistical honor, but by the king's intervention the tragic impasse of heroic subjectivity is overcome in favor of the social body. As was the case at the end of *Le Cid*, an initially criminal passion can be absolved and put to good use through the process of confession.

In the section entitled "Loi figurative" of the *Pensées*, Pascal attacks the Jesuits and other laxists in these terms: "J.-C. selon les chrétiens charnels est venu nous dispenser d'aimer Dieu, et nous donner des sacrements qui opèrent tout sans nous" (538). Fragment 254 from the same section simply reads: "Parler contre les trop grands figuratifs." What we have just witnessed in the trial of Horace would certainly have elicited similar remarks from Pascal. Tulle and his court are indeed "grands figuratifs" in their rhetorical reconstruction and absolu-

tion of Horace's crime. The original sins of the absolutist state are glossed over by a deliberate poetics of confusion. Pascal speaks at length on the figure to show the difficulty if not the impossibility of discerning the truth without the paradoxical truths of Revelation, whereas the laxists deliberately operate within the ambiguities of language to achieve their political ends: "Encore qu'on ne puisse assigner le juste, on voit bien ce qui ne l'est pas. Les casuistes sont plaisants de croire pouvoir interpréter cela comme ils font" (729). By clever interpretation and charismatic powers, analogous to the "sacrements qui opèrent tout," the king resolves the case of Horace.

Cinna: "Le maître des coeurs"

Absolution remains at the center of Corneille's political reflection in his next play. Both tyranny and tyrannicide are averted by acts of self-analysis and absolution. The monarch and his conspiring subjects are saved by examinations of conscience and pardon. The tyrant Octave enters his own heart and renounces the cycle of violence and vengeance. Faced with the prospect of killing yet another set of political rivals, Auguste pauses. He admonishes himself, "Rentre en toi," and admits that he has governed through murder and fear. Inspired by "le Ciel," he then interrogates and forgives Cinna, thereby completing his metamorphosis from the tyrant Octave into the emperor Auguste, "le maître des coeurs." Like the emperor, Cinna must examine his own conscience; Auguste orders him: "Apprends à te connaître." And in similar fashion to Auguste, he discovers a guilty heart. Ingratitude, treachery, and personal glory are his guiding sentiments, not the salvation of the state. Cinna is a desperate lover, not a civic hero. The betrayal of Auguste's adoptive daughter, Emilie, is the final challenge to the emperor's tolerance, but in a moment of self-conquest and political insight, he pardons his enemies instead of killing them. The divinely inspired act of absolution signifies both the indemnity of Auguste for his past crimes and the redemption of the conspirators, who are transformed into loyal subjects. The tragic impasse of tyranny and tyrannicide is resolved by absolution. Instead of another writing of guilt, a "proscription," the play concludes in effacement, the magnanimous "oubli" of the emperor.

All of Corneille's oeuvre, and *Cinna* in particular, has been studied many times for its political lesson. The dramatist, who once collaborated with Richelieu, is variously portrayed as the artistic spokesman

of absolutism and *raison d'Etat*, and *Cinna* is considered the most successful idealization of the absolute monarch. Bernard Dort, for example, calls Corneille an "écrivain d'Etat, poète de la légitimité, sujet convaincu des vertus de l'absolutisme" (18) and qualifies *Cinna* as a "vision presque mystique . . . en équilibre dans l'Histoire" (54). More recently, Michel Prigent has chosen to study Corneille's characters as "héros ou victimes de la raison d'Etat" (4).

The various characters in the play express at different moments the main tenets of the monarchical doctrine of an all-powerful state, a divinely sanctioned coalition of subjects under the figure of the king. *Cinna* expresses this idea of the integrity of the state guaranteed by the royal presence. Advising Auguste, he says, "Sous vous, l'Etat n'est plus en pillage aux armées; / Les portes de Janus par vos mains sont fermées" (553-54). The king prevents the state from fragmenting into rival factions, and he puts an end to the disordered state of war, symbolized by the closing of the gates of Janus. A few lines earlier, *Cinna* gives his view of the unstable tendency of democracy: "Mais quand le peuple est maître, on n'agit qu'en tumulte: / La voix de la raison jamais ne se consulte" (518-19). The power of the king to consolidate the state by binding the anarchical mob together is evident in this exposé of the "Etatist" doctrine. What has so far escaped the attention of political readings of *Cinna* is another principle of the nascent state: *pastoral power*.

Once again, my theoretical reference is the work of Michel Foucault. In his essay "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason,'" Foucault argues that the modern state, from its origins in the seventeenth century, was founded on two kinds of rationality: (1) *raison d'Etat*, which is the science of forming a lasting coalition of subjects united by the monarch, and (2) pastoral power, which is a power exercised through knowledge of individuals. Hence the title of the essay, "*Omnes et Singulatim*," since the modern state functions by simultaneously forging the group and cultivating the individual subject.

Since *raison d'Etat* has already received much critical attention, Foucault dwells on the second, unsuspected aspect of state rationality. He calls it pastoral power because it developed around the figure of the shepherd-leader discussed in Greek, Hebrew, and Christian texts. The shepherd-ruler cares for each individual member of his flock, and he must know his sheep on an individual basis. In Greek mythology, the shepherd-ruler belonged to an ideal Golden Age when men were

guided by gods. "The deity being their shepherd, mankind needed no political constitution" (Plato, *Statesman*, qtd. in Foucault 234). In the ensuing real historical period, politics set itself the task of binding citizens together to form the city-state.

The pastoral ideal, relegated to a mythical past by Greek political thought, was actively developed in Christianity, acquiring the specific features of spiritual direction, obedience, and self-renunciation which I have analyzed in the preceding chapters. Foucault characterizes the modern state as borrowing both civic and pastoral rationalities for its purposes:

We can say that Christian pastorship has introduced a game that neither the Greek nor the Hebrew imagined. A strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, self-identity; a game which seems to have nothing to do with the game of the city surviving through the sacrifice of the citizens. *Our societies proved to be really demonic since they happened to combine those two games—the city-citizen game and the shepherd-flock game—in what we call the modern state.* ("Omnes" 239, emphasis added)

Cinna is the representation of both "games" mentioned here by Foucault—the state as both unitive, civic project and problematization of the individual subject and his or her desires. My reading emphasizes the pastoral aspects of state power in *Cinna*, since this is an area where I find other critics' explanations unsatisfactory. Most readings resort to seventeenth-century moral concepts like "générosité" or "magnanimité" to explain Auguste's pardon, which appears to be a gratuitous, "inspired" gesture. I maintain that the concept of pastoral power can provide a more systematic explanation of the events portrayed in *Cinna* and make them more relevant to the historical moment of their transformation from Roman legend into reflection on the modern state.

Auguste's first words give us a clue as to the novelty of the political themes Corneille wishes to explore. Unaware of the conspiracy brewing against him, the emperor seeks the counsel of Maxime and Cinna. He asks his presumed friends which is the better form of government, monarchy or republic. This is a scene not to be found in Seneca's version of the legend, but borrowed from Dio. But just before asking the conspirators' advice, the emperor bares his soul in a truly confessional

revelation of the disappointments and anxieties of power. This passage is not to be found in Corneille's sources; the dilemma and its poetic expression are strikingly modern:

L'ambition déplaît quand elle est assouvie,
D'une contraire ardeur son ardeur est suivie,
Et comme notre esprit, jusqu'au dernier soupir
Toujours vers quelque objet pousse quelque désir
Il se ramène en soi, n'ayant plus où se prendre.

(365-69)

Auguste has discovered the same truth about desire and dissatisfaction in the political sphere that Molière's Dom Juan experiences in erotic life. There is no such thing as "possession"; desire itself has become problematical at this moment in history. One can comically celebrate this state of affairs, abandon oneself to the serial succession of new objects, and accept the dispersion of the self symbolized by the final rendezvous with the commandant. After much subjective probing and the unfolding events of history, Auguste will discover an alternative path of self-preservation based on the denial of desire and mastery over the instincts.

He considers for a moment a total renunciation of power and all of its wish fulfillments. He asks his counselors to speak freely and to advise him whether to continue on as king or abdicate in favor of a republic: "Traitez-moi comme ami, non comme souverain" (399). This invitation to informality is seen by many critics as a sign of weakness and indecision. Doubrovsky speaks of "Auguste en perte d'autonomie héroïque. . . . On ne peut établir en même temps des relations de supériorité et de réciprocité" (195). Prigent comments: "Auguste se trouve ici au plus bas degré de la politique. Il déclenche lui-même le processus subversif en renonçant au titre de 'souverain' pour celui 'd'ami': est-ce au roi d'abaisser la monarchie?" (59). But for us, knowingly or not, Auguste has spread a net of confession and confidentiality into which the rebels will fall.

This scene begins the process of disarming Cinna from within. The resolute republican who had eloquently defended the cause of Roman liberty will be touched by the emperor's openness and will find himself burdened with "remords" and "conscience," unable to carry out the assassination. Viewed strictly from the perspective of classical political power, this scene does seem to constitute a moment of weakness, but

as an exercise in pastoral power, this maneuver by Auguste is extremely efficacious. He invokes the concept of "ami," which he will repeat again triumphantly at the end of the play: "Soyons amis." This might appear as a derogation of monarchical power, but it turns out to be the other, pastoral face of the state through which Auguste triumphs.

A look at some contemporary texts on "amitié" can confirm the powerful connotations of this word in seventeenth-century court society. In general, La Rochefoucauld is severely critical of what passes for "friendship," calling it "un commerce où l'amour-propre se propose toujours quelque chose à gagner" (52). But there are rare exceptions that confirm the rule: "Un véritable ami est le plus grand de tous les biens" (106). Real friendship is based on mutual truth obligations; total confidentiality reigns between true friends: "On doit ne leur rien cacher de ce qui ne regarde que nous, se montrer à eux toujours vrais dans nos bonnes qualités et dans nos défauts même" (117).

Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* also reveals the close associations between friendship, confidentiality, and power at court. When the queen, Marie de Medicis, recruits the vidame de Chartres as her confidant, she must first "confess" him. As the vidame tells the story: "Elle souhaitait de s'assurer de mon secret et elle avait envie de me confier les siens." The queen tells him, "La manière dont je vous parle vous doit obliger à ne me rien cacher. Je veux que vous *soyez de mes amis* . . . mais je ne veux pas, en vous donnant cette place, ignorer quels sont vos attachements" (104, emphasis added). The queen here uses almost the same words as Auguste to offer the vidame a privileged place at court; he has access to power, but the queen's friendship also imposes obligations of truth and loyalty.

Finally, we must remember that in court society rank was denoted by degree of intimacy with the king. To be present at the royal *lever* or meal, to be the valet or *écuyer* of the king, was a mark of distinction, an inclusion in the power structure. The offer of royal "friendship" carried with it none of the connotations of equality or merely private conviviality we might assume in modern society, where friendship and public life are more clearly demarcated.

Unconsciously, the same bond of "friendship" is played out in the first scene of act 2 when Auguste reveals the secrets of his own heart and asks for honest political opinions from his newly initiated "friends." As monarch, he will soon be entitled to their gratitude and their consciences. For the moment, Auguste is deluded in saying to

Cinna and Maxime: "Je vois trop que vos coeurs n'ont point pour moi de fard" (628). But the words express the ideal relation between an absolute king and his subjects, the "discernement" mentioned by Cinna in line 506.

There is thus a sort of prophetic logic in the advice Cinna offers. The ardent republican finds himself defending the royalist position; he defends the superiority of the monarchy and advises Auguste to stay on the throne. He later explains to an astonished Maxime that the move was a cynical ploy to keep the emperor in power just long enough to carry out plans for a vengeful coup d'état. But in an ironic way, Cinna's adherence to the royal ideology is consistent with his being enclosed in the pastoral embrace of friendship by Auguste.

After the meeting, he seems opposed to the idea of tyrannicide and tries to convince Emilie of the gravity of such a crime:

Le Ciel a trop fait voir en de tels attentats
Qu'il hait les assassins et punit les ingrats,
Et quoi qu'on entreprenne, et quoi qu'on exécute,
Quand il élève un trône, il en venge la chute.

.
De pareils châtimens n'appartiennent qu'au foudre.

(1003-10)

Unlike some Jesuit casuists, Cinna disapproves of tyrannicide as a means of political action; the just subject must suffer the abuses of the tyrant, leaving it to divine intervention to remove him.⁹ But on this question he flip-flops maddeningly throughout the play. In the beginning, he qualifies Auguste as a "tyran" (145), and a "tigre altéré de tout le sang romain" (168). His assassination will be glorious: "Avec la liberté, Rome s'en va renaître" (226). But even after his interview with the emperor and his attempts to persuade Emilie as to the divine inviolability of kings, he still feels bound by the "serment" (993) he has pledged to his mistress and the conspirators. He is again ready to justify tyrannicide: "Il faut sur un tyran porter de justes coups" (1051), although, significantly, he now sees his action as a "crime" (1064) and intends to punish himself immediately by suicide.

Cinna's ideology is at the mercy of his love life. He would appear to be a royalist at heart and sincere in his preference for this form of government in his speeches to Auguste and Emilie, but his passions have led him to espouse the republican cause. He and his fellow con-

spirators have not even made detailed plans for the sort of government that will follow their revolt. Perhaps Cinna's political confusion is also the sign of the dialectical struggle that accompanies the emergence of absolutism. In France, the divine right monarchy asserted itself at the expense of the great feudal barons, and in Cinna's royalist speeches he blames the nobles for perpetuating civil war. On the other hand, his republican sentiments are perhaps expressions of bourgeois and parliamentary aspirations to power. During the first part of Corneille's career, the king pursued an alliance with the bourgeoisie against the great noble houses. The paradox of Cinna's republicanism and absolutism could well reflect the dynamics of political developments in Corneille's day. One can see that absolutism paved the way for the bourgeois *prise de pouvoir* by destroying the *grands* and allying itself with the robe class.

Critics such as Couton and Stegmann maintain that Corneille condemned the violent overthrow of kings: "Le tyrannicide reste toujours à la fois un régicide et un parricide, le pire des crimes. On ne peut détrôner un usurpateur que pour rendre le trône à l'héritier légitime" (Couton 98; Stegmann, Corneille ed. 268). The dramatist went so far as to falsify history in *Nicomède* to spare his public the spectacle of "une catastrophe si barbare" (Corneille, *Oeuvres* 520).

The intended lesson of *Cinna* was doubtless that tyrannicide was an unthinkable political option in the seventeenth century, but within the space of Roman history it remains a tragic possibility until the tyrant Octave is converted into the magnanimous divine right emperor. Auguste himself, in a long confessional passage, considers that the conspirators are justified, even by the gods:

Rentre en toi-même, Octave, et cesse de te plaindre.
 Quoi! tu veux qu'on t'épargne, et n'as rien épargné!
 Songe aux fleuves de sang où ton bras s'est baigné,
 De combien ont rougi les champs de Macédoine,

.
 Leur trahison est juste, et le Ciel l'autorise.

(1130-45)

Until heaven endows him with the aura of pastoral power, the cycle of tyranny and tyrannicide will continue. Until Auguste assumes both objectively and subjectively the sacred place of the monarch, political murder will remain the order of the day.

Auguste's meditation on his own guilt in the passage above is a key moment in the emergence of pastoral power. He reiterates the themes of dissatisfaction and moral disgust with the exercise of power in the world. He is searching for an end to political crimes and relief for his own conscience. The solution will come with the idea of pardon, first suggested by his wife, Livie: "Essayez sur Cinna ce que peut la clémence" (1210).

Auguste's first reaction is to retreat to the logic of *raison d'Etat*:

Tout son peuple est blessé par un tel attentat,
Et la seule pensée est un crime d'Etat,
Une offense qu'on fait à toute sa province,
Dont il faut qu'il la venge, ou cesse d'être prince.

(1251-54)

The emperor could well be following the advice of a famous *étatiste* manual, Richelieu's *Political Testament*, in which the king is advised to be implacable with conspiracies:

With regard to crimes of state it is necessary to close the door to pity, ignoring the pleas of interested individuals and the clamor of an ignorant populace, which occasionally condemns what is most useful and even indispensable to it. Christians ought to forget their personal injuries, but magistrates must not forget those which affect the public interest. In fact, to leave them unpunished is as likely to invite their repetition as to pardon and remit them.

(88)

According to a pure reason of state position, Auguste should show no mercy. But the play eschews an exclusively political rationality; it goes beyond political reason to demonstrate the superior principle of the king as pastor, as master of the heart.

Dramatically, Corneille arranges the last act of the play so that the decision to pardon the conspirators arrives as a sudden inspiration from heaven. Livie had suggested the alternate route of clemency, but Auguste had refused this advice and moved toward another proscription or "supplice" (1662). Suddenly, as the emperor learns that even his adoptive daughter has betrayed him, he receives an insight that

resolves simultaneously his own subjective malaise and the political crisis:

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers;
 Je le suis, je veux l'être. O siècles, ô mémoire,
 Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire!
 Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux
 De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu'à vous.
 Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie.

(1696-1701)

According to the monarchist logic of the play, the king's conscience is the source of political wisdom. As was the case with *Horace*, he personally solves the problem of crime and punishment; his words of forgiveness and the reiteration of the term "ami" provide a synthesis and a solution for the entire development of guilt and remorse throughout the play. Cinna and Emilie, who had refused to show remorse, suddenly find the words of guilt and pardon on their lips:

Emilie: Je connais mon forfait . . .
 Je sens naître en mon âme un repentir puissant,

(1717-19)

Cinna: O vertu sans exemple! ô clémence qui rend
 Votre pouvoir plus juste, et mon crime plus grand.

(1731-32)

Both the monarch and his subjects are delivered from their guilty consciences, the conspirators by the pardon, and Auguste by the sudden realization that he is the king and as such free from the crimes of the past. By vanquishing his own personal inclination to revenge, he has subjectively attained the monarchical position, becoming "maître de moi comme de l'univers." Livie had already exposed this part of the royalist doctrine:

Tous ces crimes d'Etat qu'on fait pour la couronne,
 Le ciel nous en absout alors qu'il nous la donne,
 Et dans le sacré rang où sa faveur l'a mis,
 Le passé devient juste et l'avenir permis.

(1609-12)

But Auguste has to realize this subjectively. By performing an absolution himself, he establishes the precedent of pardon within the state. He operates as both celebrant and recipient of this sacrament of forgiveness.¹⁰

Auguste's gesture has been variously interpreted by critics and even emperors. Napoléon understood the pardon as a cynical maneuver: "Une fois, Monvel, en jouant devant moi, m'a dévoilé le mystère de cette grande conception. Il prononça le 'Soyons amis, Cinna,' d'un ton si habile et si rusé, que je compris que cette action n'était que la feinte d'un tyran, et j'ai approuvé comme calcul ce qui me semblait puéril comme sentiment" (qtd. in Doubrovsky 213).

Jacques Maurens explains it as an example of "la vertu des Païens," and stresses the historical fidelity of Corneille: "Il serait absurde d'imaginer que Corneille ait voulu montrer Auguste bénéficiant réellement de la grâce" (274). For us, Corneille has overlaid the Roman legend so heavily with Christian elements as for it to be totally reconstructed. The drama of the conspirators' guilty consciences, the Christian theme of the morbidity of human desire, and the heroic trial of self-statement are entirely of Corneille's making. They transform the story of a political truce into one of a sacred pardon. They propose a new kind of heroism and power in which self-depreciation and confidentiality are not political blunders or evidence of weakness but rather new dimensions of power relations. The king must undergo his own subjective analysis of guilt, but he emerges as a broker of consciences, "le maître des coeurs."

Serge Doubrovsky interprets the gesture as an instance of aristocratic arrogance: "Auguste ne pardonne pas par charité ou par magnanimité, au sens moderne, mais par 'générosité' au sens du XVIII^{ème} siècle, c'est-à-dire par orgueil aristocratique, pour prouver, à ses yeux comme à ceux des autres, sa propre supériorité" (214). This interpretation stems from the author's existentialist concept of a "projet de maîtrise" based on the aristocratic hero's struggle to conquer an "existence" against the adversity of other men and the forces of history. A key moment in this Hegelian power game is the recognition of the master by the slaves, and this is apparently the real significance of Auguste's pardon.

Religion is brought into the discussion of *Cinna*, but it is interpreted as a projection of the master mentality: "Le projet monarchique, en dernière analyse est la forme extrême que prend le projet humain d'être Dieu" (218). The movement toward theology in the play would be

simply an attempt to deify the master who tries to "escape history" (217). Doubrovsky uses the key existentialist categories of "essence" and "existence" to explain how the emperor attempts to canonize his existence and reduce the other masters to a dependent state of essence: "On s'aperçoit qu'il y avait une certaine justification à la révolte anarchique et anachronique d'Emilie, à son refus de laisser son Moi se résorber dans l'Histoire, de troquer une Maîtrise, originellement jaillie du mouvement même de l'existence, contre une essence aristocratique, octroyée d'en haut, par le Ciel et par le Roi" (220). Religion in *Cinna* is simply a transparent expression of the emperor's will to power.

I would agree that religion creates power relations and that *Cinna*, in its exploration of political and religious power, could be considered a "prolégomène à tout Etatisme futur" (220). But Doubrovsky's analysis fails to appreciate the specificity of the two rationalities that combine to form the modern state, the pastoral and the civic. His account of religion as a pure exercise in aristocratic mastery is a misrepresentation of the Christian mentality. If Auguste really had pardoned by "orgueil aristocratique," would Emilie and Cinna have thrown themselves at his feet? If power is enacted by the Hegelian recognition scene of the master by the slave, what is the meaning of the many appeals to introspection throughout the play? Auguste's power is based on religion, but it involves a reversal of the Hegelian model: the slave's discourse is no longer simply acknowledgment of the master but analysis of himself as well, and the master himself takes on the identity of the shepherd.

What is missing from Doubrovsky's account is an appreciation of the "slave" essence of Christianity. To the idea of a "projet de maîtrise" and religion as transparent expression of the noble will to power, one must oppose the historical lesson of Nietzsche: "The masters have been disposed of; the morality of the common man has won" (36). This was a process that took many centuries, but by Corneille's day, I contend, the aristocratic ethos had already absorbed certain "ascetic" values. In fact, Corneille's work traces in exemplary fashion the evolution from the feudal ethic of "meurs ou tue" to the arrival of conscience and guilt as part of the master mentality: "Je sens au fond du coeur mille remords cuisants" (803), "Je connais mon forfait . . ." (1717), etc. The Nietzschean idea of a radical difference between "noble" and "priestly" values, and of the Western soul as a "battleground" between the values of "Rome and Judea," is a necessary antidote to the one-sided presentation of the "projet de maîtrise" (*Genealogy* 52).

Christianity is opposed to the knightly-warrior ethic; the will to power subsists, but it has allied itself with the "ascetic ideal." In the Nietzschean scheme, the phase of "artists of violence and organizers who build states" gives way to another creative project, the ascetic making of the self, the "secret self-ravishment, this artists' cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material" (87). In a passage that doubtless inspired Foucault's whole idea of pastoral power, Nietzsche describes the ascetic ruler as a shepherd: "He [the shepherd] must be sick himself, he must be profoundly related to the sick—how else would they understand each other?—but he must also be strong master of himself even more than of others, with his will to power intact, so as to be both trusted and feared by the sick, so as to be their support, resistance, prop, compulsion, taskmaster, tyrant, and god" (126). However one interprets Nietzsche's characterization of the ascetic as "sick"—and there are dialectical reversals and epistemological valorizations of the sick elsewhere in his philosophy—this passage does seem relevant to the emergence in *Cinna* of the paradoxical "maître des coeurs," who explores his own guilt and subjectivity before becoming the master. Like a Freudian analyst who first undergoes the didactic analysis, Auguste develops his own unconscious as a tool for understanding and governing others. He goes against the grain of orthodox politics; he appears to abandon power and descend to equality: "Traitez-moi comme ami, non comme souverain" (399). He forgives where all of the theorists of *raison d'Etat* advise severity, yet he triumphs completely. The masters have been disposed of. The stole is mightier than the sword.

POLYEUCTE: "A COEUR OUVERT"

We end our study of heroic avowal in Corneille with *Polyeucte* because structurally and thematically this play carries to its conclusion the ascending pattern of confession and heroism in the "grand Corneille" of the years 1635–40. Confessional discourse follows the fortunes of the hero throughout the rest of Corneille's career. Confession remains a major component in the elaboration and resolution of moral conflict, although the solutions become more and more tenuous as the political order degenerates. The last play, *Suréna*, marks the eclipse of the hero and his open heart. *Suréna* inhabits a tyrannical world where there is no longer a "roi des coeurs." Instead, the hero must defend the truths of his heart against a predatory state. As *Suréna* tells Pacorus,

"L'empire des coeurs n'est plus de votre empire" (1310). This development is beyond the scope of my work, however, as I have chosen Racine to illustrate the tragic possibilities of confessional discourse.

Structurally, the plot of *Polyeucte* develops as a series of personal revelations. A single event, the return of Sévère, sets in motion a series of subjective examinations and determinations to resolve the crisis by self-revelation. There are no fewer than six avowal scenes that carry the play forward.

Thematically, confession appears in a Christian context, which allows Corneille to examine the whole scope of its meaning. Primarily, the word signifies verbalization of sin, but it can also mean confession of faith. There is a natural progression from one meaning to the next, as avowal of sin prepares the soul to receive and confess the divine truth. The theme of immolation is attached to confession because public proclamation of the faith leads to martyrdom, the ultimate forum for the Christian declaration of the self. The martyr is a witness (Gk. *martur*) to the sacrifice of the body in favor of the transcendental truth of the heart; he confesses simultaneously man's sinfulness and its overcoming by signification. His body becomes a steadfast sign of the truth of his faith, a proof that God sustains him in the ordeal. As we recall, the first ritual of confession was a public chastisement of the body directly modeled upon martyrdom. In the Christian tradition, self-statement always gravitates toward masochistic and persecutory scenarios. To state the truth about the self is to suffer and die.

In *Polyeucte*, the heroic trial of self-statement follows out this logic of confession to the end. The pattern of avowal and renunciation stretches from the beginning to the end of the play. From the first issue of Pauline's mysterious dream to its final revelation as Polyeucte's martyrdom, there is a constant recurrence of confession: Pauline confesses her adulterous passion first to Sévère himself and then to her husband as a means of defending her honor but also of perpetuating a form of admiring, sublimated love. Polyeucte, in turn, confesses his faith, thereby sacrificing both his wife and his life, as if heroic self-statement finally coincided with self-destruction: "Qu'on me mène à la mort, je n'ai plus rien à dire" (1313).

The process leads the hero beyond the political and sexual arrangements that Corneille celebrates in his previous plays, namely, the state and the family. Polyeucte smashes the idols of the Roman Pantheon to proclaim a single ethical God and surrenders his wife to his former rival, Sévère. A revolutionary event safely distanced in Roman history

but not without significance for Corneille's period, a warning that the sacred is always a dangerous ally of ideology because it formulates the dreams and demands of mankind and projects them outside of history into eternity. In *Polyeucte* we see conjugal eros fatally attracted to death and imperial Rome forced to admit higher allegiances on the part of its subjects: "Je dois ma vie au peuple, au prince, à sa couronne, / Mais je la dois bien plus au Dieu qui me la donne" (1211-13). Polyeucte must give up the physical pleasures of his recent marriage as well as his attachments to the political order.

To an extent, religion is the "opium of the people," and the divine right monarchy certainly tried to exploit the quasi-sacramental aura that surrounded the king, but discourses are polyvalent. The formation of conscience and the impulse to confess are processes that could threaten absolutism. Polyeucte's Christian dream contains a theology of liberation, an egalitarian vision of a future in which "les rois et les bergers sont d'un même rang" (1529). In *Polyeucte*, the allegiance between the throne and the altar is only saved by the dubious conversion of Félix, who, as monarch, is reduced to the role of admiring spectator of heroic consciousness.

The Obligation to Reveal

Polyeucte's first dialogue with his wife reveals that he is hiding something from her: "Quel est donc ce secret?" (112). The secret turns out to be his newly found faith, and martyrdom will ultimately ensue because of the fundamental obligation of the Christian to reveal his or her heart: "Un chrétien ne craint rien, ne dissimule rien: / Aux yeux de tout le monde il est toujours chrétien" (1549-50). The believer uses verbalization to combat sin, to strengthen his resolve, and, finally, to buy the crown of martyrdom. The process of speaking the truth about oneself furnishes the "grace" necessary for heroic action. This idea is illustrated many times throughout the play.

When Pauline is troubled by a dream, Stratonice invites her to deal with it through avowal: "A raconter ses maux souvent on les soulage" (161). The confessional principle is immediately recognized and affirmed by Pauline, who replies with a formula of her own: "Une femme d'honneur peut avouer sans honte / Ces surprises des sens que la raison surmonte" (165). Before giving the details of the dream, she explains to Statonice how she once loved Sévère but bowed to her father's preference for Polyeucte; then she recounts her nightmare vision

in which her husband is murdered by the combined efforts of the Christians and her father.¹¹ Various characters offer their opinion of the dream: Pauline is worried, Polyeucte unaffected but deferential to his wife's feelings. Néarque, acting like a monastic director, offers his dia-critical advice: "Ainsi du genre humain l'ennemi vous abuse . . . / Et ce songe rempli de noires visions / N'est que le coup d'essai de ses illusions" (53, 59–60). The dream comes from the devil because it is delaying Polyeucte's conversion. But the demon's efforts are defeated in part through revelation of the dream. Polyeucte knows the motive behind his wife's fears, and these resistances can be dismantled by Néarque.

The spectator, however, senses that the dream is premonitory and the whole play in a sense a kind of *Traumdeutung*. As the events of the dream are fulfilled one by one, starting with the return of Sévère, the viewer begins to doubt Néarque's authority. Was the dream just a "noire illusion"? Are the Christians "impie et sacrilège," as Stratonice suggested (257)? To the extent that the dream retards Polyeucte's conversion, it is "diabolical." From a psychoanalytical perspective, its details could also express unconscious, repressed wishes: continued erotic attachment to Sévère, revolt against the paternal law counterbalanced by images of castration, as the father rushes in to stab Polyeucte.¹² But by the play's end, these tragic scenes from the family romance are transformed into a beatific vision.

"Avouer sans honte"

In scene 2 of act 2, Pauline is sent by Félix to mollify Sévère. Lacking the courage to confront the emperor's new favorite, whose marriage to Pauline he had thwarted, he hopes that she can save him from Sévère's wrath. It is an ignoble maneuver that puts Pauline in a difficult position. Sent by her own father to exploit an old passion for political purposes, she must preserve her honor.

The tactic she chooses is avowal, beginning the interview with a straightforward declaration that she is married and loves Polyeucte. She then announces her intention to open her heart fully to Sévère: "Pauline a l'âme noble et parle à coeur ouvert" (463).

She exploits the power of confessional discourse by taking the high ground morally. By covering herself with the "nobleness" attached to confession, she shields herself from the consequences of admitting her love. The performative, redemptive power of confession can outweigh

the facts of the case. The self-assurance of one who initiates confession bespeaks a mastery that cannot be disarmed.

She first admits that she would have chosen Sévère over Polyeucte: "Si le ciel en mon choix eût mis mon hyménée, / A vos seules vertus je me serais donnée" (465–66). Sévère presses for concessions: "Est-ce là comme on aime, et m'avez-vous aimé?" (496). But unlike Chimène, Pauline avoids the role of inquisitional victim. She retains the initiative; she confesses that she still loves Sévère violently: "Le dedans n'est que trouble et que sédition. / Un je ne sais quel charme encor vers vous m'emporte" (504–5). However, she is firmly resolved to follow her duty and remain faithful to Polyeucte. Sévère is told that he must honor and preserve Pauline's virtue because this is why he loves her in the first place. This is the strange paradox of passion and denial in Corneille; virtue itself becomes eroticized, and the passions conspire with their own refusal.

The key moment in this process occurs in the middle of Pauline's avowal when the troubling, unspecified passion, "Un je ne sais quel charme," is brought under control by a metonymic shift from "vers vous m'emporte" to an aspect or quality of Sévère: "Votre mérite est grand, si ma raison est forte, / Je le vois encor tel qu'il alluma mes feux" (506–7, emphasis added). Pauline confines her passion to "merit," which both she and Sévère can increase by honoring the paternal laws of marriage. A chaste ecstasy of denial and mutual admiration may continue: "Adieu, trop malheureux et trop parfait amant" (572).¹³

Pauline remains consistent in her use of confession to extricate herself from a difficult situation. Like the princesse de Clèves, she combats her adulterous inclination by admitting it to her husband:

Et pour vous parler avec une âme ouverte,
Depuis qu'un vrai mérite a pu nous enflammer,
Sa présence toujours a droit de nous charmer.

(614–16)

Polyeucte seems ravished by this exercise in openheartedness: "O vertu trop parfaite, et devoir trop sincère" (621). We do not know exactly all the sentiments that Pauline's confession arouses in Polyeucte's heart. Certainly, he must feel the pangs of jealousy. There is a hint of ironic cruelty in his verbatim citation of this passage when bequeathing Pauline to Sévère: "Puisqu'un si grand mérite a pu vous enflammer, / Sa présence toujours a droit de vous charmer" (1589–90).

The wound of jealousy pushes Polyeucte farther along the ascetic

path of confession and sacrifice; immediately following Pauline's confession, he announces his plan to destroy the idols and bring about his own martyrdom: "Allons mon cher Néarque, allons aux yeux des hommes / Braver l'idolâtrie, et montrer qui nous sommes" (645-46). Polyeucte is inspired by his wife's confession to make his own admission, which will in turn win back the heart of Pauline, "seduce" her to the highest form of the erotic of virtue.

Le combat de la chasteté

"O combat que surtout j'appréhende . . ." (1082). In his prison cell, Polyeucte learns that Pauline will visit him and try to dissuade his zeal for martyrdom. To prepare for the "combat" of her visit, Polyeucte first engages in a spiritual and rhetorical battle with the temptations of the flesh. The noble Pauline, the perfect wife, becomes "un obstacle à mon bien" (1144). Like the famous anchorites, Polyeucte must wage the solitary struggle against the "honteux attachement de la chair et du monde" before he can merit the crown of martyrdom (1107).

He first seeks the intercession of Néarque in heaven to help him in his struggle; then he sends a guard to bring Sévère to his cell, as he plans to give his wife away to his former rival. The other guards retire, and Polyeucte is left alone on center stage to conduct his battle for chastity. This is not an eroticism of immediate physical presences, like that of Dante's Paolo and Francesca, but a baroque, "obscene" representation of passion where temptation and *jouissance*, whether spiritual or carnal, are not the meeting of two bodies but solitary internal encounters between a subject and his pleasures. This is the modern subject of sexuality alone in the confessional:

Source délicieuse en misères féconde,
 Que voulez-vous de moi, flatteuses voluptés?
 Honteux attachements de la chair et du monde,
 Que ne me quittez-vous quand je vous ai quittés?
 Allez, honneurs, plaisirs, qui me livrez la guerre:
 Toute votre félicité
 Sujette à l'instabilité
 En moins de rien tombe par terre,
 Et comme elle a l'éclat du verre
 Elle en a la fragilité.

(1105-14)

What he confronts are not the unclean spirits, the literal temptresses of the Desert Fathers, but the abstract qualities of Counter-Reformation spirituality, "flatteuses voluptés," "honteux attachements de la chair," "honneurs, plaisirs." They are personified and engaged in an imaginary dialogue, "Que ne me quittez-vous quand je vous ai quittés?" Since they persist in tormenting Polyeucte, they are invited to show what they really have to offer. But he is not seduced by the spectacle: "Vous étalez en vain vos charmes impuissants" (1116). This is because God reveals to him the real spectacle of human history: "Il étale à son tour des revers équitables / Par qui les grands sont confondus" (119–20). The passions are bested in a theatrical contest with God, as Polyeucte's soul becomes the discerning spectator of his own desires. In the end, he turns aside human love, the masochistic "source délicateuse en misères féconde," and opts for a spiritual *jouissance* beyond death:

Saintes douceurs du ciel, adorables idées,
 Vous remplissez un cœur qui vous peut recevoir;
 De vos sacrés attraites les âmes possédées
 Ne conçoivent plus rien qui les puisse émouvoir.
 Vous promettez beaucoup et donnez davantage.
 Vos biens ne sont point inconstants
 Et l'heureux trépas que j'attends
 Ne vous sert que d'un doux passage
 Pour nous introduire au partage
 Qui nous rend à jamais contents.

(1145–54)

Here, desire satisfies itself in an imaginary "en plus" in which "adorables idées" overfill the heart. Polyeucte's wife is superfluous because in his mystical vision he has transcended human sexuality; his mystical pleasure is feminine as well as masculine, figured by the heart, which can be active or passive—here passively filled in ecstasy, later to eject its blood in martyrdom and convert Pauline. A "doux partage" puts an end to the division of human sexuality. Images of eternity and overflowing contrast with the earlier metaphor of human desire as a fragile mirror that "en moins de rien tombe par terre" (1112). The flesh is comparable to "l'éclat du verre": fleeting illusions and broken glass. This threatening imagery of the passions as dangerous and sharp was also present in the "glaives" that God suspends over the heads of the wicked (1121).

Polyeucte's personal vision concludes with a shift to the communal "nous." This signifies that he has projected himself forward into a community of saints and abandoned his worldly attachments. Thus he can deal impassively with Pauline. He has come to the point of not seeing, not knowing Pauline: "Et mes yeux éclairés des célestes lumières / Ne trouvent plus aux siens leurs grâces coutumières" (1159–60). He has been delivered from her visual charm and is only interested in her as a potential member of his new sect. Like Horace, he can cut his personal ties of affection in one verse: "Je ne vous connais plus, si vous n'êtes chrétienne" (1612).

Nothing More to Say

Polyeucte's confession is complete; he has nothing more to say: "Qu'on me mène à la mort, je n'ai plus rien à dire" (1312). One last time he tries to explain the mysteries of his faith. He declares the ethical superiority of his own God over those of the empire:

La prostitution, l'adultère, l'inceste,
Le vol, l'assassinat, et tout ce qu'on déteste,
C'est l'exemple qu'à suivre offrent vos immortels.
(1667–69)

It is significant that Polyeucte ranks the Tridentine sins par excellence, those of the flesh, before crimes of violence. The real locus of Polyeucte's conversion is his passionate heart, which has ascended from the primitive gratifications of prostitution, adultery, and, of course, incest to a spiritual, postgenital stage, figured by the androgynous heart.

The *words* of Polyeucte continue to meet with incomprehension, and he betrays a certain impatience at trying to explain his religion: "Mais j'ai tort d'en parler à qui ne peut m'entendre" (1663). Even his final exchange with Pauline ends on a severe note of admonition, not total accord:

Pauline: Je te suivrai partout et mourrai si tu meurs.

Polyeucte: Ne suivez point mes pas ou quittez vos erreurs.
(1681–82)

The full performative power of Polyeucte's confession will only be realized by the spectacle of his death. The final signifier that carries out

Polyeucte's confession and converts Pauline is his dismembered body. The folly, the horrid spectacle of martyrdom, is seen and understood: "Je vois, je sais, je crois, je suis désabusée" (1727). Heroic confession concludes with the destruction of human beauty and form. An anti-theatrical, antitheatrical moment concludes the representation of the self. The martyr scene occurs offstage. Polyeucte is beyond classical representation; he has pronounced his last phrase and stepped into infinity, the vanishing point that orders perspectivist representation but remains beyond.

UN AVEU SI FUNESTE: TRAGIC AVOWAL IN RACINE

Je meurs, pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste.

PHÈDRE

Jean Racine belonged to the other principal religious family in seventeenth-century France, the Jansenists. He was, literally, the child of Port-Royal, the destitute orphan raised by two nuns, Marie Desmoulins, his maternal grandmother, and her daughter, Racine's "mother," the future abbess of Port-Royal, "la soeur Sainte-Thècle, qui à travers sa grille, lui avait servi comme de mère" (Sainte-Beuve, qtd. in Mauron 213). A boarding student at the Petites Ecoles, he received perhaps the finest education available in his day to any student regardless of social class. The Jansenists were educational innovators, and some of the most brilliant minds of the century taught in their schools. Racine had the good fortune to study under Pierre Nicole, Antoine Le Maître, and the Hellenist Claude Lancelot. His mental and affective life was formed in the severe, exacting mold of his Augustinian masters, for whom "l'esprit des enfants est presque tout rempli de ténèbres" (Nicole, qtd. in Taveneaux, *Catholicisme* 1:178).

The pupils at Port-Royal lived a quasi-monastic life: up at five-thirty in the morning for communal prayers and the first page of Latin before breakfast, then a translation exercise, carefully written and read to the "maître"; meals were taken in silence while a text from the Bible was read aloud. The children were taught in small groups of five or six and never let out of sight of the master, even while asleep.¹ The Jansenists sought to rectify, as they saw it, the naturally wicked inclinations of the child by isolating him from nature and confining him to an artificial world of permanent surveillance and calculated activity. According to Louis Marin, education at Port-Royal was based on the ideology of

representation. The students became "subjects"; all of their behavior and mental development was "represented," rendered visible and intelligible to the master, who alone, like the *Deus absconditus* of Jansenist theology, remained outside the model yet assured its operation:

Dans sa forme même, l'espace pédagogique reproduit, en le redoublant dans un modèle, à la fois l'espace religieux, où le Dieu caché toujours présent et toujours absent, présent parce qu'absent, parle silencieusement à chaque être pour l'amener au salut, et l'espace politique où le Roi a fait du langage une puissance par le réseau complexe et réglé des échanges entre ses sujets et lui.

Le système pédagogique, comme appareil idéologique permet ainsi de traduire, avec sa force propre, la transparence depuis toujours perdue de la représentation par la constitution d'un ensemble cohérent de comportements, d'attitudes et de pratiques, par des discours visibles. Dès lors, la confusion radicale introduite par le péché se trouve dissipée, dans le lieu scolaire, par le jeu de la présence et de la visibilité: omniprésence du regard du maître qui rend visibles et expose dans leur signification les individus vivants pour les assujettir à la culture, en faire des sujets culturels—réduits à la "nature" et à la "raison"—bref, des sujets de l'idéologie de la représentation dont le maître est lui-même un représentant. (*Critique* 214)

Even the excellent Latin and Greek education that the young Racine received had its theoretical justification. The natural, maternal language was considered "le langage de la concupiscence"; dead languages were deliberately taught to denaturalize the child: "Ce langage des morts est toujours un peu mort et n'a rien qui pique vivement notre amour-propre" (Nicole, qtd. in Marin, *Critique* 210).

In this "clôture scolaire," as described by Marin, confession played a special role, and the young Racine would have encountered it at every turn of his early education. If education and representation at Port-Royal necessarily produce images of confinement, it is my suggestion that the confessional would most accurately express all of the nuances of the model.

The sacrament was of the very essence of Jansenism and its educational theory. In his *La Vie quotidienne des Jansénistes*, René Taveaux says that "la pénitence, plus que tout autre, fut, de la part des port-

royalistes, l'objet d'une attention, d'un soin de tous les instants," and of their schools: "Plus que d'écoles proprement dites, il s'agit d'une direction de conscience, inapte à être étendue ou transposée aux collègues" (83, 133).

Confession is vital to the whole Jansenist moral project and education in particular because it enforces the subjective side of the ideology of representation. Marin emphasizes the "regard du maître," which sustains the system by making the behavior of the students visible, reducing them, as it were, to the status of transparent portraits. But equally important to the subjectivizing process is the discourse whereby the student actively renders himself visible to the master's gaze and offers up for inspection the internal world of thought. Nicole says that one must "travailler toute sa vie à faire son portrait, c'est-à-dire qu'il faut y donner tous les jours quelque coup de pinceau, sans effacer ce qui en est déjà tracé. . . . Nous formerons peu à peu un portrait si ressemblant que nous pourrions voir à chaque moment tout ce que nous sommes" (*Oeuvres* 48). Subjectivization and representation work hand in hand most effectively when the subject is compelled to make a portrait of his inner life, not just when he is spied on externally by the master. The system operates perhaps at its maximum efficiency when the gaze of the master is internalized and the subject is able to move closer and closer to self-knowledge by construction of the portrait.

Another indication of the importance of confession within Jansenism is the amount of energy its apologists devoted to issues dealing with this sacrament. Port-Royal's most sustained and successful polemic concerned the rigorist approach to confession. Arnauld, in his *De la fréquente communion*, heralded the inventor of the confessional, Charles Borromeo, and advocated the strictest form of penance. In contrast to the Jesuits, he wanted absolution to be very difficult to obtain. For serious sins, it should be deferred for weeks while the confessant meditated and performed arduous penances. Arnauld even tried to revive the practice of public penance for public sins. Jansenist priests were encouraged to keep written records of their parishioners, "livres d'état des âmes," (see figure 7) which kept account of who confessed and who didn't. They could require the "billet de confession" before administering the sacraments and take steps to ostracize those members of the community who did not confess regularly and lead a life they approved of (Taveneaux, *Vie* 136).

The Jansenist insistence on rigorous confession was the main cause of their struggle against the Jesuits and the occasion of one of the most famous theological debates in the history of literature. The erudition and wit of Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* managed to popularize the controversy and put humor on the side of the rigorists.

We know that Racine personally lived the exciting atmosphere surrounding the *Provinciales*. According to Raymond Picard, "Racine les a lues et relues" (28). His school was so dominated by the issue that his Latin teacher, Nicole, even used the letters in his classes for translation exercises. We have no record of Racine's reaction to these events, but it is interesting to note that the first surviving piece of his correspondence from this period refers to the tenth *Provinciale* and is an attack on the Jesuits in the satirical style of Pascal's letters.

The real Jansenist theology of confession, however, was anything but a laughing matter, and as we penetrate the atmosphere of fear and trembling surrounding confession at Port-Royal, we see elements of a drama that occurs with regularity in Racine's theater: the tragic scene of avowal. Confession was at the core of Jansenist spirituality because, as Nicole says, the whole moral life depends on knowledge of the self: "Comme l'ignorance de soi-même est la source de tous les vices, on peut dire que la connaissance de soi-même est le fondement de toutes les vertus" (*Oeuvres* 29).

This quotation is taken from his essay "De la connaissance de soi-même," in which he distinguishes the Christian *Nosce te ipsum* from its Greek and Roman counterparts. For Nicole, the pagan motto is just a strategic practice in a world governed by self-interest and "amour propre." In the "world," know thyself is really intended for others: they should know themselves and they would see how pitiful they really appear to us; or self-knowledge can take the form of vain contemplation of the image of the self reflected in the objects one possesses and the fear and respect one commands. Only Christian self-knowledge is authentic for Nicole because it forces the believer to contemplate "le fond de son âme," an object for the Jansenists of truly horrible dimensions. The sight of just one sin in its true perspective would be fatal: "Il est vrai de dire de tous nos péchés connus dans toute leur étendue, ce que l'Ecriture dit de Dieu: 'Non videbit me homo, et vivet'" (58). Here we begin to enter into the tragic, if not fantastic, vision of one of Racine's masters. Only the elect are aware of the general depravity of the world; the greater part of humanity lives in total self-ignorance,

unaware that its passions make it the prey of demons: the world is "un lieu de supplices."

Tous ces gens aveuglés et abandonnés à leurs passions sont autant de preuves de la rigueur de la justice de Dieu; c'est elle qui les livre aux démons qui les dominent, qui se jouent d'eux, qui les trompent, qui les jettent dans mille désordres, qui les affligent dans ce monde par une infinité de misères, et qui les précipitent enfin dans l'abîme pour les tourmenter éternellement.

Ainsi le monde entier est *un lieu de supplices*, où l'on ne découvre, par les yeux de la foi, que des effets effroyables de la justice de Dieu; et, si nous voulons nous le représenter par quelque image qui en approche, figurons-nous un lieu vaste, plein de tous les instruments de la cruauté des hommes, et rempli, d'une part, de bourreaux, et de l'autre, d'un nombre infini de criminels abandonnés à leur rage.

La bouche de l'enfer est toujours ouverte . . . les grands et les petits, les forts et les faibles, les riches et les pauvres y entrent pêle-mêle à tous moments. (*Oeuvres* 147, emphasis added)

The only remedy to the situation is for the Christian to attain true knowledge of the self through recourse to a rigorist "directeur": "Ce n'est pas assez d'avoir un directeur, ni même d'en avoir un éclairé. Il faut de plus s'abandonner à lui sans déguisement et sans artifice, et avoir dessein de se conformer au jugement qu'il fait de nous, et non pas le porter à suivre le nôtre" (*Oeuvres* 57).

These are the distinguishing features of the Christian knowledge of the self: a vision of humanity unconscious of the depths of its perversity yet absolutely obligated to discover and confess its hidden sins because, in the hereafter, a terrible day of self-knowledge awaits all men: "cette vue nous est inévitable."

C'est en vain que nous fuyons de nous connaître; cette vue nous est inévitable, puisque Dieu ouvrira les yeux à tous les hommes pour se voir tels qu'ils sont, mais avec cette horrible différence, que ceux qui n'auront pas voulu se connaître dans ce monde-ci, se verront malgré eux, dans toute l'éternité, d'une vue qui les comblera de rage et de désespoir; au lieu que ceux qui n'auront pas évité de se voir en cette vie, et qui auront travaillé par ce moyen à détruire en eux ce qui déplaît à Dieu, ne verront plus

rien en eux pour jamais qui ne leur cause de la joie. (*Oeuvres* 28)

La punition commune des réprouvés dans l'autre vie sera de se voir eux-mêmes, le caractère général des réprouvés en celle-ci est de ne se voir point; de sorte qu'il est également vrai que l'on n'entre dans le ciel qu'en se connaissant, et dans l'enfer qu'en ne se connaissant pas. (*Oeuvres* 34)

Here again, we encounter Dante's vision of human society in its entirety subjected to the universal obligation to confess. Self-knowledge is the road to salvation or the fatal discovery of perdition; confession is either divine cure or demonic torture in the "lieu de supplices." Even more than Dante, Nicole seems to insist on the solitary psychological torture of hell as eternal contemplation of the wicked self. He imagines a more private, inward heaven or hell as opposed to Dante's extrapolations of the communal life of the medieval city. In Nicole's afterlife bliss or torture awaits an individual subject whose joy or suffering consists in self-reflection.

But what makes the Jansenist quest for the self not only terrifying but truly tragic is that it is an uncertain process:

On ne connaît jamais avec certitude ce qu'on appelle le fond du coeur, ou cette première pente de l'âme qui fait qu'elle est ou à Dieu ou à la créature. . . . Nul ne connaît avec certitude si ses péchés sont remis. . . . Souvent on croit avoir la grâce, lorsque l'esprit n'est occupé que de pensées et de mouvements tout naturels, et souvent aussi on prend pour des mouvements de la nature de véritables opérations de la grâce. (*Oeuvres* 67)

Une inclination naturelle de l'amour-propre nous porte à prendre nos pensées pour des vertus, et à croire que nous avons dans le coeur tout ce qui nage sur la surface de notre esprit. (qtd. in Bénichou 142)

Corneille's image, in the *Imitation*, of "le cabinet du coeur" suggests a reassuring enclosure where the self can successfully manage its desires, whereas for Nicole the heart is an abyss; consciousness floats at the surface of unknown depths, and the real motivations for acts remain obscure. For Nicole and the other Jansenists, the heart is close to God because it is the locus of helplessness and loss; Corneille and the

voluntaristic tradition represented the heart as an inner sanctum of purified intentions and heroic choices.

We recognize Nicole's language as being in concert with the whole tradition of spiritual direction. The hidden origin of thoughts and the recourse to a spiritual director to interpret the *logismoi* of the soul go back to the Desert Fathers. But the Jansenist metaphor for the soul as unsoundable depth makes spiritual analysis extremely perilous if not impossible. Corneille's architectural metaphor for the soul, the "cabinet," evokes geometric design and rational containment, a reassuring symmetry between the outward appearance of the confessional and the inner space it sought to govern, whereas Nicole's aquatic imagery suggests an undefinable fluid space in continuous movement.

A Jansenist never left the confessional feeling reassured; even the power of the sacrament left him worrying about the state of his soul. Pascal describes the proper affect of a Port-Royalist after confession: "Une personne me disait un jour qu'il avait une grande joie et confiance en sortant de confession. L'autre me disait qu'il restait en crainte. Je pensais sur cela que de ces deux on en ferait un bon et que chacun manquait en ce qu'il n'avait pas le sentiment de l'autre. Cela arrive de même souvent en d'autres choses" (Pensée 712). Suspended between fear and joy, obeying an "inevitable" obligation yet ignorant of his or her real intentions, the confessant was not supposed to be relieved but rather reduced to a state of total culpability and confusion, trusting only in the inscrutable truth and mercy of God.

We have here all the elements of a tragic outcome to confession and knowledge of the self. Fear of a final eschatological scene of avowal pushes the Jansenist to confess in this life, yet in the world, in the "lieu de supplices," he cannot trust himself or even the ministers of confession. The world and the Church are full of "demons" whom God has set loose to prey upon men and women's passions. Thus avowal itself is not a heroic act of volition but rather a fateful wager, a moral obligation to discover a truth formally unattainable within the spiritual and psychological model of "le fond du coeur" and "le Dieu caché." As we will see, Racine's theater explores many of the tragic possibilities of confessional discourse.

"UNE FILLE D'UZÈS"

An anecdote in a letter from Racine to his friend Vitart, dated 30 May 1662, seems to foreshadow the confessional scenes in many of his later

plays and hint at many of his aesthetic principles. Only recently liberated from the Port-Royal schools and hoping, *faute de mieux*, to succeed his uncle in a priory, the future dramatist was eyewitness to an event that fascinated him and that he narrates as follows:

Je vous dirai une autre petite histoire, qui n'est pas si importante; mais elle est assez étrange. Une jeune fille d'Uzès, qui logeait assez près de chez nous, s'empoisonna hier elle-même et prit une grosse poignée d'arsenic, pour se venger de son père, qui l'avait querellée fort rudement. Elle eut le temps de se confesser, et ne mourut que deux heures après. On croyait qu'elle était grosse, et que la honte l'avait portée à cette furieuse résolution. Mais on l'ouvrit toute entière, et jamais fille ne fut plus fille. Telle est l'humour des gens de ce pays-ci, et ils portent les passions au dernier excès. (2:438)

This "petite histoire" is Racine's first dramatic creation; real life seems to have furnished him with a scenario that will occur frequently in his theater: the cruel uncomprehending father, excessive passion leading to a tragic confession that is poison and death, the futile attempt to understand the soul through dissection of the body. One can already foresee the series of persecutory parents (Agrippine, Mithridate, and Thésée) in the father, and the confessant victims (Monime, Eriphile, Hippolyte, and Phèdre) in the "jeune fille." The fundamental mystery of the girl's behavior and the belated attempt to solve the riddle by interpreting bodily signs recall many instances of misapprehension in Racine, especially Thésée's misjudgment of his son's guilt, based on the "signes certains" he thinks he sees, followed by his chagrin over the body of his dead son, who, like the heroine of the story, remains a virgin, ironically never more a virgin ("jamais fille ne fut plus fille"), yet no longer a son or a daughter but a dissected body.²

Philosophically, the story seems to illustrate the tragic limits of the classical *episteme*. The classical system of representation, as described in Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*, was based on the translation of all knowledge into visible signs, which in turn could be revealed by a transparent language. According to this scheme, living organisms were classified by their external, visible differences. The internal body was considered obscure and less satisfactory as a means of establishing differences and identities between species. It was only in the nine-

teenth century that internal anatomy would emerge as the crucial means of distinguishing organisms.³ The tale might also be seen as a typical patriarchal insistence on the visible.⁴

The Uzès story dramatizes the tragic incompatibility between external bodily signs and internal truth and suggests a link between Racine's daily life and his theater. For us it also marks the transition from the purely religious discourse of Port-Royal to the beginnings of Racine's career as an artist. The Jansenistic moral terminology is still there: the "passions au dernier excès," "la honte," "le temps de se confesser," but Racine seems to appreciate the story essentially for its dramatic and psychological content. His narration of the events is not overtly moralizing but rather coldly analytical and ironically tragic. The one element the real story cannot relate—the girl's private confession—will be supplied by the dramatist. He will invent a modern, psychological tragedy based on such a minimal event, the "petite histoire," like the "action simple, chargée de peu de matière" discussed in the preface to *Britannicus*. The moment of revelation and understanding will proceed from *aveu* instead of Aristotelian *anagnorisis*. The tragic truth that Racine seeks is confirmed not by external signs and plot development but rather by the tragic hero's own obligation to confess. Racine's heroes and heroines never manage to carry out Phèdre's desperate wager: "Je meurs pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste." Death is inevitable but only after the torment of confession. If there is one supreme God in the Racinian pantheon, it is Minos, who will inflict his suffering in the words of his victims.

BRITANNICUS: "SURPRENONS, S'IL SE PEUT, LES SECRETS DE SON AME"

Britannicus was Racine's first attempt to compete with Corneille on his own terms by writing a political tragedy. Until then, he had been considered a "tendre," capable of producing only sentimental dramas. By taking up a well-known political subject from Roman history, Racine was attempting an artistic *prise de pouvoir* not without analogy to the coming of age of Néron depicted in the play itself. As Antoine Adam has said, the story is in some sense "le drame de Racine même" (4:327). But both internally and externally, the play represented a tragic version of emancipation, of the first *essai* that must also be a *coup de maître*. The first performances were met with the hostility of Corneille and

involved Racine in a bitter quarrel with the patriarch of the stage. The drama itself tells a similar story of a rebellious *coup de théâtre* and the troubled succession of generations.

Néron has been raised and educated in a seemingly moral atmosphere. His tutors, Seneca and the virtuous soldier Burrhus, were handpicked by Agrippine and have imbued the young emperor with a strong sense of duty and conscience. A crucial scene in the play (3.1) gives us an insight into the pedagogical principles of Burrhus and his standing as spiritual counselor to Néron. The emperor has just announced that he is hopelessly attracted to Junie, "le mal est sans remède" (777), but Burrhus appeals to his pupil's *heart* and the memory of his virtuous childhood:

Vous redoutez un mal faible dans sa naissance.
Mais si dans son devoir votre coeur affermi
Voulait ne point s'entendre avec son ennemi;
Si de vos premiers ans vous consultiez la gloire;
Si vous daigniez, Seigneur, rappeler la mémoire
Des vertus d'Octavie, . . .

(780–85)

Furthermore, Burrhus firmly believes that he has educated and formed a conscientious emperor who can rely on an inner, hereditary model of virtue. He reassures Agrippine: "Pour bien faire, Néron n'a qu'à se ressembler" (218).

Yet all is not well in this "clôture scolaire" arranged by Néron's mother. It is a perverse, hypocritical system designed to keep Néron virtuous only in the interests of Agrippine. She has no illusions about the virtues of her son: "Il se déguise en vain; je lis sur son visage / Des fiers Domitius l'humeur triste et sauvage" (35–36). Whether Néron turns out to be virtuous or not is of little concern: "Que m'importe, après tout, que Néron, plus fidèle, / D'une longue vertu laisse un jour le modèle" (43–44). She tells Burrhus pointedly that his moral teaching must not come between her and her son: "Ai-je donc élevé si haut votre fortune / Pour mettre une barrière entre mon fils et moi?" (144–45).

Néron is thus confronted with an ambiguous moral *dispositif* at cross-purposes with itself: is it designed to keep him forever in a state of infancy? or, as Burrhus claims, can it produce an autonomous emperor at the head of a glorious empire? One thing is certain: the out-

come of the play and Néron's place in history will be decided by who wins the battle over Néron's conscience. As Racine says in his preface, he has chosen to represent history from within the confines of Néron's conscience: "Il ne s'agit point dans ma tragédie des affaires du dehors. Néron est ici dans son particulier et dans sa famille." The question is whether the conscience of the young emperor can come to grips with the crisis of his emancipation and make an enlightened civic decision, or whether his mind will be clouded by his own passions and the perfidious influence of Agrippine and Narcisse, who rival Burrhus for control over Néron's conscience. The play, then, like those we considered by Corneille, focuses on the use of pastoral power in a court society and how consciences are turned inward to influence political events. Racine depicts the tragic possibilities of the same process; it is Agrippine who, at the outset, sets the tone for the exploration of Néron's conscience: "Surprenons, s'il se peut, les secrets de son âme" (127).

We sense, especially after Racine's skillful exposé of Agrippine's character and the ominous image of her secret power ("derrière un voile, invisible et présente"), that the battle for the secrets of Néron's soul will not necessarily result in the triumph of virtue. We foresee the possibility of a malevolent pastoral power.

This impression is soon reinforced by the first appearance of the play's main character. He distinguishes himself by the cruel, inquisitorial treatment of his prisoner, Junie. The fateful resemblance between mother and son becomes apparent here. Like the mother, Néron takes special pleasure in concealing himself to manipulate his subject. His sexual interest takes the same form as his mother's political machinations. He first becomes attracted to his captive when, from a hidden vantage point, he sees her brought in by the guards:

Excité d'un désir curieux
Cette nuit je l'ai vue arriver en ces lieux,
Triste, levant au ciel ses yeux mouillés de larmes.

(386-88)

His desire, like his mother's power, feeds on "curiosity" and knowledge; he must know more. He questions Narcisse about the obscure, idyllic couple: "Britannicus, l'aime-t-il?" (427). The fact that Junie remains far from the court and ignorant of Néron's erotic expertise is somehow a provocation; she has not even inquired whether "César est

aimable, ou bien s'il sait aimer" (426). His desire seems to be directed as much at penetrating the mystery of the young couple's love as at Junie herself. Or so it would seem, since he takes more pleasure in interrogating and spying on her than in actually trying physical consummation.

His first interview results in a candid avowal on the part of Junie of her love for Britannicus, coupled with an oblique criticism of the dissimulating manners of the court:

Il a su me toucher,
Seigneur; et je n'ai point prétendu m'en cacher.
Cette sincérité sans doute est peu discrète;
Mais toujours de mon coeur ma bouche est l'interprète.
Absente de la cour, je n'ai pas dû penser,
Seigneur, qu'en l'art de feindre il fallût m'exercer.
J'aime Britannicus.

(637-43)

The conversation is further aggravated by Junie's attempt to excuse Britannicus's love by appealing to obedience: "Il m'aime; il obéit à l'Empereur son père, / Et j'ose dire encore à vous, à votre mère" (560-61). This is precisely the wrong thing to say because it makes no distinction between Néron and his mother ("à vous, à votre mère").

But in a profound sense, Junie has made the correct identification. Néron is a sadistic voyeur like his mother. Following Junie's avowal he devises a cruel scenario in which she will turn Britannicus away while Néron watches in secret: "Il vaut mieux que lui-même / Entende son arrêt de la bouche qu'il aime. . . . Renfermez votre amour dans le fond de votre âme" (668, 680). He takes delight in corrupting Junie's loyalty to the truth and making his rival suffer.

But like his mother, he also manages to see only what he wants to see. The sadistic staging of his victims' secrets corresponds to his own inner blindness. Both mother and son fail to anticipate the next move of their victims, and both lose all sense of themselves while spying on others. Despite Néron's explicit stage directions, Junie manages to communicate a note of warning to Britannicus. Britannicus knows that despite her words of separation there is some doubt as to their full meaning, and he returns a second time for clarification. There he learns that, as he suspected, Junie was not speaking the truth.

At this time, Néron is also confronted with a loss of mastery over his victims. Britannicus denounces him as a voyeur:

Je ne sais pas du moins épier ses discours.
Je la laisse expliquer sur tout ce qui me touche,
Et ne me cache point pour lui fermer la bouche.

(1066–68)

The emperor's plan to manipulate the speech of his subjects has been turned around on him, and the truth is now out in the open. But it is fatal knowledge; Junie and Britannicus have each uttered their avowals and will not recant. At the expense of their lives, their hearts and mouths will remain in accord. Avowal has brought the victims to the point of tragic self-knowledge; they have confessed the truth of their love in the face of tyranny, and that truth will cost Britannicus his life.

The inquisitors, on the other hand, are characterized by self-delusion. This becomes clear in Néron's case as the plot develops. At the crucial moment of decision, a battle is waged between Narcisse, the evil counselor, and Burrhus. The latter invites Néron to give up an imaginary attachment to Junie ("Vous vous le figurez," 778) and return to the moral center of his heart (781). Narcisse, however, exploits Néron's real aversion for his true self. As if to illustrate Nicole's idea that vision of the self is intolerable, Narcisse manages to reveal to Néron just enough of his true self to frighten him into crime and total flight from himself. He tells Néron that his mentors are talking about him in these terms:

Pour toute ambition, pour vertu singulière,
Il excelle à conduire un char dans la carrière,
A disputer des prix indignes de ses mains,
A se donner lui-même en spectacle aux Romains,
A venir prodiguer sa voix sur un théâtre.

(1471–75)

There is just enough truth in this portrait to push Néron over the edge, and he makes the decision to have Britannicus murdered.

In similar fashion, the more Agrippine thinks she has regained power through access to the secrets of Néron's heart, the farther she is

from the truth about herself. Toward the end of the play, she exhibits true hubris following her supposed reconciliation with Néron, basing her supreme self-confidence on the fact that she has been admitted into the confidentiality of the emperor:

Mais bientôt, reprenant un visage sévère,
 Tel que d'un empereur qui consulte sa mère,
 Sa confidence auguste a mis entre mes mains
 Des secrets d'où dépend le destin des humains.
 Non, il le faut ici confesser à sa gloire,
 Son coeur n'enferme point une malice noire.

(1595–1600)

At this point in the play, Néron is actually carrying out plans for the murder, but Agrippine thinks her power is secure because she has shared secrets with the emperor. "Surprenons les secrets de son coeur." This was the formula for Agrippine's power, but instead she has fallen for a carefully staged reconciliation. The secrets of the heart can be theatricalized too, and a person is never so much the dupe as when he thinks that he has surprised the other's confidentiality.

The final tragic irony is that Néron's act of emancipation from his mother marks him precisely as her offspring. What particularly horrifies Burrhus about the assassination is that Néron watched the entire spectacle without blanching: "Ses yeux indifférents ont déjà la constance / D'un tyran dans le crime endurci dès l'enfance" (1711–12). Enclosed in a pedagogical and moral system designed by Agrippine, Néron mistakenly chose crime as the path to authenticity, but he ended up only furthering Agrippine's line of depraved power.

Corneille, in *Cinna*, had imagined how the cycle of crime and tyranny could be broken by the use of pastoral power. Auguste gains true insight into himself and stops the conspiracy by a gratuitous act of pardon and self-overcoming. At a certain moment of *Britannicus*, Burrhus thinks he is about to witness the same sort of miracle. He has convinced Néron of Britannicus's innocence and can already see the touching scene of fraternal reconciliation and pardon: "Appelez votre frère, oubliez dans ses bras" (1385). An inspired act of magnanimity would put an end to Agrippine's conspiracy and her malevolent influence. Néron would break with his criminal heredity by an act of heroic virtue. But this never happens. Néron chooses crime and theatricality;

he remains at the surface of himself, the bad actor who assumes the impassive mask of tyranny with the murder of his brother.

The opposition between authentic self-knowledge and theatricality is deeply rooted in the Augustinian tradition. In the *Confessions*, Augustine speaks of being "carried away" by stage plays, away from the inner core of the self where, as he says, God "is more inward to me than my most inward part" (41). He calls theater a "miserable madness" that inspires man to love in spectacle "tragical things which yet himself would by no means suffer" (36).

Unlike tragedy, which carries the spectator away, Augustine's own text tries to force a moment of self-scrutiny: "Go back into your heart, ye transgressors, and cleave fast to Him that made you" (57). As opposed to the diversion of pagan literature, Christian biographies and autobiographies of saints force a *conversio*, a turning inward, as in the instance when the book of the life of St. Anthony provokes the conversion of the two Carthaginian noblemen and Augustine is sure that God has used the book to effect his own conversion: "Thou, O Lord, didst turn me round towards myself" (124).

The Jansenists continued this tradition of anti-theatricalism. Nicole's comment in his first "Visionnaire" (31 Dec. 1665) that "un poète de théâtre est un empoisonneur public, non des corps, mais des âmes" provoked a furious response from Racine which rendered public his divorce from Jansenism, a situation that lasted until 1687 (Nicole, *Traité* 23; Picard 448).

Thus Racine's own life was marked by the dialectic between the external appeal of the pagan theater and the inner truths of the heart. Already in 1663, as he was just beginning his career as a dramatist, he had received this letter of admonition from Mère Agnès, which makes the same Augustinian distinction between the truths of the heart and the dangerous falsehoods of the theater:

Je vous conjure donc, mon cher neveu, d'avoir pitié de votre âme, et de rentrer dans votre cœur, pour y considérer sérieusement dans quel abîme vous vous êtes jeté. Je souhaite que ce qu'on m'a dit ne soit pas vrai; mais si vous êtes assez malheureux pour n'avoir pas rompu un commerce qui vous déshonore devant Dieu et devant les hommes, vous ne devez pas penser à nous venir voir, car vous savez bien que je ne pourrais pas vous parler, vous sachant dans un état si déplorable et si contraire au christianisme.

(qtd. in Mauron 245, emphasis added)

It is hard not to see an analogy between the atmosphere of this letter and the sort of moral claustrophobia that Néron feels. In both cases we see a domineering mother who appeals to the truths of the heart as a means of controlling a son. It is a tragic version of the Augustinian crisis because the *conversio* is governed by an oppressive maternal instance. To the extent that Racine is Néron he is in a tragic double bind: his only path to originality and authenticity consists in the transgressive activity of the theater.

Perhaps he could take comfort from the fact that, as the play demonstrates, one is never more faithful to the parental model than when one decides to improvise, to be absolutely original. Racine, the prodigal of Port-Royal, was destined to leave for posterity the greatest monument to its spiritual grandeur.

BAJAZET: "INVISIBLE D'ABORD ELLE ENTENDAIT MA VOIX"

Early in Racine's next play, *Bajazet* (1672), the vizir Acomat explains how he first gained entry into the seraglio. He was interrogated by Roxane, the sultana, who remained hidden from view: "Invisible d'abord elle entendait ma voix" (203). This mode of operation is similar to that of Néron and Agrippine, and, like them, the heroine of this play is a cruel tyrant of pastoral power bent on satisfying her desires through surveillance and extorted confessions. The seraglio itself is an emblem of the coercive-discursive power the sultane exercises; it is a secular equivalent to the cloister or the confessional, and Acomat is admitted to this forbidding space of sexual segregation and enforced avowal much as if he were entering a convent. His entry or rejection will be based on a purely symbolic exchange that reduces him to a voice, a message, that Roxane can safely decode without the distraction and inherent reciprocity of a face-to-face visual encounter.

Seasoned by a lifetime in politics, the vizir knows that he is in unfamiliar territory. Exiled from the sultan's court and the battlefield, his accustomed arenas, he feels reduced to "un pouvoir inutile" (90). In the confines of the seraglio, it is Roxane who exercises a different sort of "pouvoir absolu" (104). Here, the conventional rules of political power are suspended, and battles are waged with mute spies, discovered secrets, and written warrants of love and death. While the sultan is away consolidating his power by the classical means of military con-

quest, his female consort uses all the resources of another kind of power to overthrow him.⁵

She presides over the harem, which perpetuates the royal bloodline and shrouds the familial politics of the sultan in secrecy. It is the private domain of the sovereign's pleasure and procreation, as well as the prison where sibling rivals are secretly murdered or neutralized by "la molle oisiveté des enfants des sultans" (116). As gatekeeper to this hidden world, it is Roxane's function to have total knowledge of its inhabitants' desires. Like Minos, she demands self-revelation of all those entering her kingdom. She is the hermetic seal, the *sigillum*, that simultaneously hides the sultan's murderous business while keeping an eye on his rivals. Her power stems from both knowledge and dissimulation. She is the "dépositaire" of the sultan's letters who masks his plans from all others while at the same time spying on his rivals and exposing them to his wrath.

If indeed her power is absolute, it is because she alone assures communication between the inside and the outside of the Byzantine body politic. She allows the sultan to remain at a safe distance from the turmoil and passion of the seraglio while unmasking his enemies and using their passions to destroy them. Roxane is in the seraglio but not of it; she upholds the difference between the tragic world of desire and familial violence and the public world of effective political action. She holds in confidentiality the murderous letter that condemns the sultan's brother to death and at the same time signifies her identity as loyal and royal accomplice to his designs.

The question is whether Roxane will remain content with her position and enlightened as to its symbolic underpinnings, or whether, inevitably, power will not beget passion that in turn destroys the critical vision necessary to power/knowledge. The other question is whether the sultan has really granted Roxane total objectivity over the seraglio: can he remain beholden to a woman who occupies a function so vital to his power?

The catalyst that sets in motion the events that will answer these questions is the ambition of the disenfranchised vizir, Acomat. He sees that Roxane is vulnerable to a certain kind of passion that will suit his ends. In possession of a letter ordering the immediate execution of Bajazet at the slightest political move, she has not yet actually seen her prisoner. Acomat praises the captive's charms and excites the sultana's curiosity. The first meeting has the desired effect; Roxane exhibits the

letter and Bajazet sees that feigning love for the sultana is his only chance for survival. The clandestinity of their love is the final enticement for Roxane:

Tout conspirait pour lui. Ses soins, sa complaisance,
Ce secret découvert et cette intelligence,
Soupirs d'autant plus doux qu'il les fallait celer,
L'embarras irritant de ne s'oser parler,
Même témérité, périls, craintes communes,
Lièrent pour jamais leurs coeurs et leurs fortunes.

(157-62)

Power is what precipitates a certain kind of predatory love in the Racinian world. As Roland Barthes has said, "Un simple rapport, à l'origine purement circonstanciel (captivité ou tyrannie) est converti en véritable donné biologique, la situation en sexe, le hasard en essence" (*Sur Racine* 19). Here, the biological and inquisitorial power that Roxane holds over Bajazet, as granted by the sultan's letter, generates a sadistic love.

What seems to form the strongest bond between the lovers is the "secret découvert." Roxane's curiosity about her captive was a key element of her attraction to him, and Acomat correctly anticipated and flattered this aspect of the sultana's erotic inclination. Curiosity and the attendant secrecy of the relation are sexualized.

But herein lies tragic error; the very secrecy and impossibility of expression that Roxane finds so compelling in fact hides Bajazet's real passion for Atalide. Roxane thinks she has devised the ultimate disguise for the secret affair by having Atalide receive the attention and affection of Bajazet, which she then transmits to Roxane:

Atalide a prêté son nom à cet amour . . .

.

Du prince, en apparence, elle reçoit les vœux;
Mais elle les reçoit pour les rendre à Roxane.

(168, 172-73)

However, one deception hides another. Atalide, who in principle is only the go-between, the inert signifier of Roxane's love for Bajazet, is in reality the secret recipient of his love. The sultana has hidden her secret love in plain view by inventing the fictitious couple Bajazet-

Atalide, who in turn have profited from this arrangement by concealing their love even more openly.

The role of confession in the play will be to unravel all the secrets of the seraglio. Little by little, Roxane's inquisitorial powers lead her to the tragic discovery that her own attempts to conceal her illicit love from the sultan did nothing but accommodate the young lovers and that her analytical powers can only confirm her blindness and betrayal.

The specific event that inaugurates the tragic day is Roxane's decision to bring Bajazet out of the seraglio and have him proclaimed the new sultan. Acomat awaits her command to rally the disenchanted aristocratic faction, the Janissaires, and the people of Byzantium. He proposes turning the sultan's death sentence of Bajazet against him by exposing it:

Montrons l'ordre cruel qui vous fut adressé;
Surtout qu'il se déclare et se montre lui-même
Et fasse voir ce front digne du diadème.

(247-49)

The effect of the letter in Acomat's hands will be to show the people the barbarity of Amurat. Roxane, however, has already used the sultan's letter to coerce Bajazet into a feigned amorous relation with her. But before taking the fatal step of openly announcing the palace revolution, she wants verbal confirmation of Bajazet's love and a promise of marriage. The words that Atalide has been putting in his mouth are no longer enough:

Je ne vous presse point de vouloir aujourd'hui
Me prêter votre voix pour m'expliquer à lui:
Je veux que, devant moi, sa bouche et son visage
Me découvrent son coeur sans me laisser d'ombrage.

(327-30)

When the prince arrives he is greeted with Roxane's triumphant announcement: "Rien ne me retient plus; et je puis, dès ce jour, / Accomplir le dessein qu'a formé mon amour" (423). The irony is that the "dessein" that Roxane announces was based on the sultan's letter, which she used to blackmail Bajazet. Unwittingly, her plan will bring about her own death and that of Bajazet, both of which are preordained in another letter sent by the sultan. Roxane's "dessein" will be

tragically echoed by a series of homonyms and puns involving the sultan's signature ("sein") and Bajazet's love letter, which falls from Atalide's breast ("sein").⁶

When pressed to confess his love and reassure Roxane, Bajazet evokes a series of obstacles. Roxane reiterates the threat upon the prince's life:

Songez-vous que je tiens les portes du Palais?
Que je puis vous l'ouvrir ou fermer pour jamais:
Que j'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême.

(507-9)

This produces a grudging avowal of power if not love: "Oui, je tiens tout de vous . . . Je ne m'en défens point; ma bouche le confesse" (513-17). Only Bajazet's mouth, not his heart, will confess at this point. Roxane launches into a tirade and suddenly loses all sense of restraint:

Bajazet, écoutez, je sens que je vous aime;
.
Ne désespérez point une amante en furie.
.
Tu vas en triompher. Oui je te le confesse.

(538, 541, 554)

For a moment she has abandoned her position as analytic master of the palace, and the vocabulary of confession in her discourse signifies vulnerability and blindness. When even this violent outburst produces only a tepid reply from Bajazet, Roxane calls for the guards and issues the menacing order to Acomat, "Sortez," meaning that the coup is off and Bajazet will perish. This first avowal scene is a premonition of the final interrogations of Bajazet and Atalide, which will tragically enlighten Roxane about her errors. Roxane's illusion can only be sustained by perceptual error, inhibited speech, and silence; each time Bajazet is summoned to avow his love, the truth starts to appear.

Acomat manages to reconcile the two lovers and recounts that scene to Atalide:

J'ai longtemps, immobile, observé leur maintien.
Enfin avec des yeux qui découvriraient son âme,
L'une a tendu la main pour gage de sa flamme;

L'autre, avec des regards éloquents, pleins d'amour,
L'a de ses feux, Madame, assurée à son tour.

(884–88)

Here Roxane has surrendered her gaze of power; instead she exposes her own soul to Bajazet through her eyes. She has lost all diacritical vision of her victim. She sees only his "regard éloquent" and is totally misled.

When Bajazet recounts this scene to Atalide, he explains that Roxane was so convinced of his love that any anxiety he displayed—caused in reality by his love for Atalide and his aversion to lying—was taken as the visible proof, the external symptom, of his passion for Roxane. He describes his "confusion, que Roxane, Madame, / Attribuait encore à l'excès de ma flamme" (993–94). Bajazet is tongue-tied and distressed, but Roxane is reassured and has returned to her former state of interpreting reticence as a tacit avowal, when in fact the meaning of these hesitations is the hidden love for Atalide.

Roxane is like a psychoanalyst with a theory about transference love; she is axiomatically committed to the idea that Bajazet's repression is a sign of love for herself, the analyst. However, she has crossed the line of objectivity and fallen prey to the countertransference. Instead of maintaining a critical distance from her role as proxy parent in the analytic situation, she has mistaken a methodological artifact for real emotions directed at herself.

She is in this predicament because she has set up a discursive protocol between herself and Bajazet which resembles that of psychoanalysis. Her captive must obey the fundamental rule, he must not be given the chance to conceal anything:

Je veux que, devant moi, sa bouche et son visage
Me découvrent son coeur sans me laisser d'ombrage;
Que lui-même en secret amené dans ces lieux,
Sans être préparé se présente à mes yeux.

(329–32)

What further weighs upon Bajazet's behavior and his words is the barely disguised death threat. By refusing Roxane's offer, the prince would be spurning the hand that holds a sword over his head. Roxane states the threat in the most visceral, biological terms, reminding Bajazet: "Que j'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême; / Que vous ne respirez

qu'autant que je vous aime" (509–10). This casts Roxane in the role of mother, the source of life itself for Bajazet. Not only must he tell all, but his interrogator is his mother.

I suspect that the threat and the truth obligation complement each other in installing Roxane as the mother. From earliest childhood, today as in Racine's day, the child in the West is taught that total frankness with the parent is the best policy. How many times in early life is a child subjected to truth games in which he or she is told that a crime, if freely confessed, will be forgiven: "Faute avouée est à demi pardonnée." By the time confession or psychoanalysis arrives on the scene, this fundamental obligation to tell the truth is already deeply inculcated. In my opinion, it is a key factor in producing the transference phenomenon. The analyst or confessor is readily assimilated to the father, first and foremost because, in Western families, confessing to the father is a well-entrenched ritual.

In Racine's own day, child-rearing manuals were insisting on just such practices. As an example, I cite this exhortation from *La Civilité nouvelle* (1671): "In the evening, the parents should examine his conscience: 'If the child has lived like a man,' he should be washed and caressed. If he has committed a few venial offenses, the parents should correct him" (qtd. in Ariès 389). Having thus doubly enforced her maternal identity as life-giver and inquisitor, Roxane is bound to provoke a certain psychological authenticity on the part of Bajazet. She will ultimately obtain the truth from him, but it will be a violent rejection of her maternal, incestuous overtures.

To a degree, the spectator can empathize with Roxane's error. All her terrible power and knowledge seem incapable of producing a final unambiguous declaration of love. To be in love is to suffer Roxane's dire need for the truth and the gnawing suspicion that the other is unfaithful. The play suggests that, at a certain level, the lover's jealousy is justified because all love is a transfer, a remake. It always contains an element of betrayal because it is a message sent from elsewhere. Underneath the desired object is a letter of betrayal. One must be satisfied with appearances, since to pursue the question leads to the truth but also to the fulfillment of the letter in *jouissance* and death.

Bajazet's fate bears this out; he cannot allay the jealousy and suspicion of either Atalide or Roxane. He complains of the "injustes détours" that he must use to express his love for Atalide and remain alive (1135). Symbolically, this means that his object-love for Atalide will always bear the traces of the maternal love signified by Roxane. There

is a truth and a plausibility in Bajazet's tacit avowals to Roxane. By means of the seraglio she holds Bajazet in the grips of a maternal tyranny to which he must at least pay lip service. But, conversely, Roxane cannot enjoy total possession of her prey. The paternal threat forces him to leave the nest; he is destined to carry his love elsewhere.

"La lettre et le sein"

It is only the discovery of the letter that leads Roxane to the truth of the situation. Her suspicions are aroused by Bajazet's continued resistance to marriage and Atalide's eagerness to find excuses for his behavior, so she decides to test Atalide using the inquisitorial ruse of a death threat. Showing Atalide the sultan's letter, "Vous reconnaissez, Madame, et la lettre et le sein" (1183), she announces her intention to follow the letter's order: "Ne vous montrez à moi que sa tête à la main" (1192). Atalide faints, and Roxane draws a tentative conclusion: "Mon malheur n'est-il pas écrit sur son visage?" (1222). At first she retreats from this unpleasant idea: "Fermons plutôt les yeux" (1236). Her eyes are closed in passionate blindness, not analytic insight. But soon, the *written* evidence of betrayal is unavoidable. The fainting spell has made Atalide *unconscious*. A love letter bearing Bajazet's signature ("sein") has fallen from her breast ("sein"). Atalide-the-message-bearer has turned out to be the very object of Bajazet's love.⁷ The breast, emblem of Roxane's maternal ascendancy over Bajazet, has given way to the letter.⁸

"Jouir de sa honte"

Roxane's reaction to the discovery of the letter reveals that her passion is as much for secrets and vengeance as for Bajazet himself: "Ah! je respire enfin et ma joie est extrême / Que le traître une fois se soit trahi lui-même" (1274). Her respiration quickens at the prospect of the sadistic pleasure she will enjoy in interrogating Bajazet. Like Dante's Minos, she derives sexual gratification from the extorted avowal: "Je veux voir son désordre et jouir de sa honte" (1361). As the play draws to a close, the exposure of the letter will bring about the ultimate realizations of desire. In the final confessional scenes, the tyrant and the martyrs will confront each other one last time.

Bajazet is interrogated first and confirms the truth of his "lettre sincère": "J'aime, je le confesse" (1493). The analysis is complete, the

patient has spoken the words of recognition, acknowledged the letter; his life itself is less important than the transcendental obligation to speak the truth; the ultimate sense of the letter is the inexorable march toward martyrdom which follows avowal.

Atalide confesses to the truth of the letter also: "Je viens mettre mon coeur et mon crime à vos pieds" (1576). She even tries to deflect Roxane's sadistic pleasure toward herself: "Jouissez d'un bonheur dont ma mort vous répond" (1616). But the only effect is to furnish the last bit of evidence necessary to convince Roxane of the depth of the young couple's love and make her even more jealous. The avowals of the two lovers do nothing but prepare the final phase of their passion and death.

Confessional discourse carries out the meaning of tragic love—the death of the lovers. United by the fatal words, the "noeuds," they will perish separately, Bajazet strangled in his cell and Atalide by her own dagger.

One last time Roxane offers Bajazet a chance to repent and recant. He can redeem himself by assisting impassively at the spectacle of Atalide's execution.

Dans les mains des muets viens la voir expirer,
Et libre d'un amour à ta gloire funeste,
Viens m'engager ta foi: le temps fera le reste.
Ta grâce est à ce prix, si tu veux l'obtenir.

(1544)

Like Néron watching his brother die, Bajazet can deny the truth of confession and assume the mask of political life in the "lieu de supplices."

The only thing that remains to be done to complete the tragic pattern is for Roxane to fall victim to the same inquisitorial power that she abused. Fittingly, we learn that the sultan had his own spies within the seraglio. Some unknown "bouche infidèle" has informed him of the sultana's crimes. The order he gives to the assassin Orcan to kill Roxane after Bajazet, "l'amante après l'amant," informs the spectator that he knew about Roxane's secret love.

Racine is consistent in his imagery of the fatality of desire in Roxane's death. The final revelation of her desire will also involve a letter. After killing Roxane, Orcan displays the sultan's signature: "De son auguste seing reconnaissez les traits" (1683). The fatal tendency of

Roxane's love was also hidden in a letter. Her breast reveals the meaning of her desire when the sultan's message ("seing") is plunged into her breast: "Oui, j'ai vu l'assassin / Retirer son poignard tout fumant de son sein" (1676-77).

IPHIGÉNIE: "UN BEL AUTO-DA-FÉ"

Après le tremblement de terre qui avait détruit les trois quarts de Lisbonne, les sages du pays n'avaient pas trouvé un moyen plus efficace pour prévenir une ruine totale que de donner au peuple un bel auto-da-fé; il était décidé par l'université de Coïmbre que le spectacle de quelques personnes brûlées à petit feu, en grande cérémonie, est un secret infaillible pour empêcher la terre de trembler.

VOLTAIRE, CANDIDE

According to R. C. Knight, it is not until *Iphigénie* that "l'helléniste se déclare" in Racine's work. The earlier plays, even those based on Greek legends, were too heavily influenced by contemporary models to be authentically Greek and thus, in Knight's view, most distinctively Racinian.⁹ With *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*, Racine's unrivaled knowledge of Greek literature is finally put on display; the world of Sophocles and Euripides is resurrected on the French stage; the Parisian audience is treated to the same spectacle that moved ancient Athens. As Racine claims in the preface to the play, "Mes spectateurs ont été émus des mêmes choses qui ont mis autrefois en larmes le plus savant peuple de la Grèce."

For us, the sense of this Greek revival will be a truly tragic figuration for avowal. With *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*, Racine opens a dialogue between the myths of antiquity and the Jansenist theology of confession; the archaic ritual of human sacrifice and the menacing figure of Minos will be used to represent the fate of the tragic victim who must confess in the "world."

As an oblique representation of Racine's own world, these dramatic creations suggest that the fatal mechanisms of guilt and sacrifice are reappearing within the structures of a supposedly Christian civilization. If, as one critic has said, classical tragedy is the "high mass of Absolutism," in Racine's hands it becomes an ambiguous combination of rituals in which the cruel divinities of archaic Greece return to exact specifically Christian obligations and punishments.

In *Iphigénie*, the ancient "victimary mechanism" of sacrifice is allied with avowal to produce something analogous to an auto-da-fé. Collective anxiety and violence are focused upon the victim by means of confession. The specifically Greek modes of divination—the oracle and the augury sacrifice—are supplemented by the confessional revelation of the tragic victim. Murder and sadistic *jouissance* are sanctioned by a sacred ritual of truth which puts an end to the crisis threatening the community. Through the auto-da-fé, the city purges itself, not of the blood guilt of ancient tragedy, but (since the modern state is a community of subjects) of the impure consciences in its midst. This is the mechanism that Voltaire so lucidly and comically exposes in *Candide*: the earthquake, symbolizing collective unrest and dissension, is "solved" by the auto-da-fé. In *Iphigénie* we will see a similar selective culpabilization of a victim in response to a natural disaster and a social crisis.

To what extent Racine's play, like Voltaire's philosophical tale, exposes and denounces the scapegoating mechanism is debatable. Two of today's most insightful readers of Racine, J.-M. Apostolidès and Gérard Defaux, have used René Girard's theory of "la crise sacrificielle" and "le mécanisme victimaire" to elucidate the play's psychological and sociological dynamics (Defaux 171; Apostolidès, "Belle" 152). Both see *Iphigénie* as conforming to the pattern of a political and sexual crisis, caused by mimetic rivalry, being resolved by the death of a single victim. By sacrificing a "fille du sang d'Hélène," the Greek confederation achieves a sacred unity under the king Agamemnon and distances itself from the uncontrolled female passion inherent in Hélène's lineage.

For Defaux, Racine deconstructs the myth three centuries in advance of Girard: "A trois bons siècles d'intervalle, Jean Racine et René Girard font dire la même chose aux grands mythes de l'antiquité. Comme celle de Girard, la lecture de Racine est essentiellement déconstruction du mythe" (171). This is achieved by revealing and, implicitly, questioning the brutal logic of the ancient sacrifice.

In my view this interpretation of *Iphigénie* could be enriched by reference to some of Girard's latest work on Christianity. After all, for the author of *Le Bouc émissaire*, the Bible was largely responsible for exposing and deconstructing the sacrificial mechanism in the West:

Nous voyons bien que les Evangiles refusent la persécution. Mais nous ne soupçonnons pas que, ce faisant, ils en démontent les ressorts, et c'est la religion humaine dans son ensemble qu'ils

défont, et les cultures qui en dérivent: nous n'avons pas reconnu dans toutes les puissances symboliques qui vacillent autour de nous, le fruit de la représentation persécutrice. Mais si l'emprise de ces formes se desserre, si leur puissance d'illusion s'affaiblit, c'est justement parce que nous repérons de mieux en mieux les mécanismes de bouc émissaire qui les sous-tendent. Une fois repérés ces mécanismes ne jouent plus; nous croyons de moins en moins en la culpabilité des victimes qu'ils exigent, et privées de la nourriture qui les sustente, les institutions dérivées de ces mécanismes s'effondrent une à une autour de nous. Que nous le sachions ou non, ce sont les Évangiles qui sont responsables de cet effondrement. (149)

If Racine was able to anticipate Girard in revealing and undoing the ancient sacrificial process, it was through the systematic use of Christian discourse, most notably confession and the examination of conscience.

Whether or not one can be so optimistic as Girard in asserting that Christianity has successfully destroyed the scapegoating mechanism is something that *Iphigénie* can also reveal.¹⁰

"Je cède et laisse aux Dieux opprimer l'innocence"

As the play opens, Agamemnon denounces the injustice of the gods, who demand the sacrifice of his innocent daughter. Throughout the work, other characters echo this protest against a moral scandal. Clytemnestre: "Les Dieux ordonneraient un meurtre abominable?" (921). Iphigénie herself: "Ciel! pour tant de rigueur de quoi suis-je coupable?" (922). Clytemnestre again: "Le Ciel, le juste Ciel par le meurtre honoré, / Du sang de l'innocence est-il donc altéré?" (1267-68).

From within and without the play, Racine felt the need to question and ultimately to change this aspect of the myth. A modern audience would not accept the idea that innocent blood should be spilled to appease the gods and launch a military expedition. In the preface he addresses this problem:

Quelle apparence que j'eusse souillé la scène par le meurtre horrible d'une personne aussi vertueuse et aussi aimable qu'il fallait représenter Iphigénie? Et quelle apparence encore de dénouer ma tragédie par le secours d'une déesse et d'une machine, et par

une métamorphose qui pouvait bien trouver quelque créance du temps d'Euripide, mais qui serait absurde et trop incroyable parmi nous? (1:670)

The solution will be to find a victim deserving public execution, and this will turn out to be the soul-searching Eriphile, who is fatally driven to discover her true self and to die:

J'ignore qui je suis; et, pour comble d'horreur,
Un oracle effrayant m'attache à mon erreur,
Et, quand je veux chercher le sang qui m'a fait naître,
Me dit que sans périr je ne me puis connaître.

(427-30)

In a series of private scenes, she will reveal herself to her confidant, Doris. Through these avowals she gains no mastery over her criminal impulses but falls deeper and deeper into passion and disorder. By the end of the play, she has served as her own "oracle effrayant," and Calchas, the interpreter of oracles, has only to step forward and designate her as the real Iphigénie named to be sacrificed.

What Eriphile first confesses to is an irresistible, masochistic attachment to Achilles:

Je me flattais sans cesse
Qu'un silence éternel cacherait ma faiblesse.
Mais mon coeur trop pressé m'arrache ce discours,
Et te parle une fois pour se taire toujours.

(477-80)

She describes being carried away by Achilles: "Et me voyant presser d'un bras ensanglanté / Je frémissais, Doris, . . ." (492-93). According to the fatality of the gaze in Racine, she had but to look at her ravisher: "Je le vis: son aspect n'avait rien de farouche" (497).

Her unnatural love turns quickly into jealousy and hatred when she discovers that Achilles loves Iphigénie. Her real motive for coming to Aulis becomes less a matter of resolving her identity than of contaminating the happy couple with her misfortune: "Peut-être approchant ces amants trop heureux, / Quelqu'un de mes malheurs se répandrait sur eux" (519-20).

Finally, her cruel inverted love invents the ultimate revenge. When

Agamemnon tries to save his daughter from the sacrifice, Eriphile informs Calchas and spreads the news among the rebellious solidiers. She exacerbates the sacrificial crisis by stirring up discontent against the king and bringing the angry camp to the boiling point. The aristocratic Achilles is confronted by the "flots tumultueux" and must turn them back with the "elite" of his Thessalians (1520). A dangerous state of anarchy and loss of hierarchical order threatens the Greek nation. In its collective malaise it seeks a victim.

The Sacrifice of Sacrifice

Eriphile manages to incriminate herself for the one crime that makes her own sacrifice justifiable: she deliberately touches off the sacrificial conflagration by blocking Iphigénie's escape. She earns a place on the cruel altar by trying to keep her rival there. Her vengeful plan even includes a phantasy of military defeat for the Greeks:

Ah Doris, quelle joie!
 Que d'encens brûlerait dans les temples de Troie,
 Si troublant tous les Grecs, et vengeant ma prison,
 Je pouvais contre Achille armer Agamemnon;
 Si leur haine, de Troie oubliant la querelle,
 Tournait contre eux le fer qu'ils aiguïssent contre elle,
 Et si de tout le camp mes avis dangereux
 Faisaient à ma patrie un sacrifice heureux!

(1133-40)

Thus Racine has systematically burdened his sacrificial victim with all imaginable sins: sexual deviancy, jealousy, revenge, murder, and, most important of all, the crime of inciting the sacrificial crisis.¹¹ As such she becomes a truly malevolent, even demonic, presence in Aulis. Aegine and Clytemnestre denounce her in just such terms:

Aegine: Madame? Savez-vous quel serpent inhumain
 Iphigénie avait retiré dans son sein?
 Eriphile, en ces lieux par vous-même conduite,
 A seule à tous les Grecs révélé votre fuite.

Clytemnestre: O monstre, que Mégère en ses flancs a porté!
 Monstre, que dans nos bras les Enfers ont jeté!

(1675-80)

Her death will signify the sacrifice of sacrifice itself. With her destruction, the evil conflagration will disappear from the city.

Calchas reads the sentence of the oracle; he is, as it were, handing her over to the secular arm. This time it is the one true God, "le Dieu," who speaks through his voice, not the indeterminate multitude who seemed to condone the sacrifice: "Les Dieux ordonneraient un meurtre abominable?" (1747, 921). Eriphile is designated as the guilty victim: "Sous un nom emprunté, sa noire destinée / Et ses propres fureurs ici l'ont amenée" (1758–59). This is the voice of the monotheistic, ethical divinity, who has heard her guilty confessions and consigns her to the flames.

One is entitled, however, to wonder to what extent Racine has really deconstructed the sacrificial mechanism. Is the death of Eriphile really the last sacrifice? or does it not offer the model of a new type: murder justified by confession, community bonding at the expense of a self-denouncing victim? One innocent victim is saved by the Christian weighing of conscience; divine vengeance no longer falls blindly upon the blood descendants of its enemies. But if biblical values have averted one type of sacrifice, they open the door to another. Eriphile's guilt blinds the assembly to the barbarity of the sacrificial ritual. The altar remains: "Mais le fer, le bandeau, la flamme est toute prête" (905). In their consent to the savage spectacle, the crowd has put on the blind-fold as much as the victim.

A truly evangelistic deconstruction of the vengeful sacrificial mechanism can only be found in a scene such as this:

Teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayst thou to her? And this they said, trying him, that they might have whereof to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground. But when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped, and with his finger wrote on the ground. And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst. (John 8.4–10)

Here writing reveals the unconscious of the crowd to itself; they are shown their own guilt and forget the scapegoat.

AUGURY, ANAGNORISIS, AVOWAL

Iphigénie also contains an equivocal deconstruction of two other tragic forms: sacrificial augury and *anagnorisis*. Racine establishes a link between avowal and these two elements which transforms and to some extent liberates his archaic models but which also suggests the possibility of a regression of Christian discourse toward the tragic. As with the scapegoating mechanism, he substitutes confession for the pagan forms to produce his own type of tragedy. Scenes of revelation and recognition become scenes of avowal.

Considering sacrificial augury first, a study of the sources reveals that Racine added this dimension to his *Iphigénie*. In all probability, his recent reading of Euripides' *Electra*, which contains a graphic description of animal sacrifice, was the source of inspiration.¹² He must have felt that this dimension of the sacrifice added an authentic note of the Greek sacred and was especially appropriate for his theme of the enigmatic oracle and the two Iphigénies. In any case, not only is Racine's innocent Iphigénie threatened with a sacrifice to atone for collective guilt, but her death would also be the occasion of a searching for a divine revelation. Clytemnestre describes what awaits her daughter:

Un prêtre, environné d'une foule cruelle,
Portera sur ma fille une main criminelle,
Déchirera son sein, et d'un oeil curieux
Dans son coeur palpitant consultera les Dieux.

(1301-4)

The image of the torn breast and the palpitating heart exposed in its anatomical literalness is in sharp contrast to the metaphorical talking heart found in Corneille. It bespeaks the impossibility of mitigation or absolution in a world of brutal passions, faulty interpretation, and merciless retribution. The priest, like the Uzès father, would find nothing in the open heart; the Greek augury is powerless to discover its secrets. It is only after confession that it makes sense to violate the heart. For Eriphile, as for Roxane, the pierced heart can only confirm what their guilty confessions alone divulged.

For Iphigénie, the threat of violation and dismemberment is dissipated by Eriphile's confessions. She avoids having her heart gouged out because, through the revelations of Eriphile and the divinely inspired interpretation of Calchas, who, like the spectator, seems to have

heard the guilty revelations, the truly culpable heart is exposed. For Eriphile, the menace of a sacrificial augury is a premonition of her fate. She takes the place of the priest; her confessions are the sought-after revelations, and, symbolically, she applies the blade to her own breast to conclude the sacrifice.

The divinatory aspect of the sacrifice shows how the sacred justifies violence under the guise of a search for truth. In addition to purifying the city, the sacrifice promises a sacred revelation. Racine has discovered an archaic link between sacrifice and knowledge. The first lesson of mankind must have been a cruel one. The experience of death, sadistic pleasure, and the mysterious signifying chain of the viscera are the elements of a primordial scene of knowledge and desire. At the dawn of history, according to Nietzsche, sadism was an acceptable form of pleasure, and this must have been one of its variants.

If the Christian religion was responsible in general for curbing such behavior, one must admit that in the case of the auto-da-fé it perpetuated the ancient association between sadism, spectacle, and divine revelation. The glorious end justified the means; torture was salutary if it produced a confession:

Here are extracts from the official accounts of two tortures carried out in the sixteenth century. In the first is a woman accused in 1568 of not eating pork and of changing her linen on Saturdays: "She was tied on the *potro* with the cords, she was admonished to tell the truth and the *garrotes* were ordered to be tightened. She said, "Señor, do you not see how these people are killing me? I did it—for God's sake let me go.'" (Kamen 176)

What is astonishing about such scenes from the Inquisition is that one often finds an incongruous jubilation in the midst of such appalling inhumanity. For example, a man is described as having recanted while being led to the stake to be burned: "This caused great pleasure and joy among all, and the Franciscan, who was kneeling down, arose and embraced the criminal." The executioner even asks for the condemned man's blessing: "The criminal forgave him gladly, and the two embraced. . . . And desirous that the soul which had given so many signs of conversion should not be lost, I went round casually behind the stake to where the executioner was, and gave him the order to strangle him immediately because it was very important not to delay.

This he did with great expedition" (qtd. in Kamen 195). Here one must admit that the link between violence and the sacred is as blindly powerful as ever, despite sixteen hundred years of biblical deconstruction. At the crux of the situation there are no longer any mysterious oracles to designate the victim but, instead, the hapless voice of a confessant, upon whose words hang an orgy of violence and religious ecstasy.

The happy ending of the play (Achille and Iphigénie joined in marriage as the winds return to drive the Greek fleet toward the shores of Troy) risks diverting attention from the somber logic that has played itself out. If the confessions of Eriphile, seconded in extremis by the sudden decree of Calchas, have saved Iphigénie from the patently unjust ancient sacrifice, they have also provided the mass of soldiers with a victim:

L'armée à haute voix se déclare contre elle,
Et prononce à Calchas sa sentence mortelle.
Déjà, pour la saisir, Calchas lève le bras.

(1769-71)

Rather than a Girardian deconstruction of the tragic myth, Racine's *Iphigénie* suggests a troubling continuity of the tragic myth within Christianity. A more satisfying account of what has happened might be possible by radicalizing Paul Ricoeur's theory of the cycle of the myths. In *The Symbolism of Evil* he develops the idea of a Christianity never finished with its historic encounter with Greek civilization and the tragic myth: "Tragedy has never finished dying. Killed twice, by the philosophical Logos and by the Judeo-Christian Kerygma, it survived its double death. The theme of the wrath of God, the ultimate motive of tragic consciousness, is invincible to the arguments of the philosopher as well as of the theologian" (326). Ricoeur argues for the supremacy of the "Adamic myth" and its capacity for absorbing the meaning of the other myths. Racine, however, represents a more unstable relation between the myths, a moment in history when tragic blindness and victimization invest Christian forms.

Racine has recycled the tragic myths through the Christian ritual of confession. Since Racine, we have become condemned Jansenists whose consciences are burdened with the great crimes and exceptional destinies of the houses of Atreus and Oedipus. Caught in the Oedipal Mousetrap, compelled by the Lateran decree or the fundamental rule,

we must all confess to the crimes of the family romance.¹³ Psychoanalysis would not be imaginable without this convergence, during the early modern period, of Christian avowal and Greek *anagnorisis*.

The final tragic form linked to confession in *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* is *anagnorisis* or "recognition." For Aristotle, it was a necessary component of the tragic plot, designed to evoke pity and fear. He defines it as follows: "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing about either a state of friendship or one of hostility on the part of those who have been marked out for good fortune or bad. The most effective recognition is one that occurs together with a reversal, for example, as in the *Oedipus*" (*Poetics* 11). He specifies further that the best recognitions are not the result of external signs, bodily marks, and scars, but those that "arise from the incidents themselves, striking us, as they do, with astonishment through the very probability of their occurrence as, for example, in the action of the *Oedipus* of Sophocles and in the *Iphigenia*, where it is reasonable for the heroine to wish to dispatch a letter" (16). He also discusses at what point the tragic hero should become aware of the fatal consequences of his act; the best two possibilities are: (1) "One does the deed in ignorance and after he has done it recognizes his relationship to the other person"; and (2) "The most effective is the final type, for example, in the *Cresphontes*, where Merope is going to kill her son and does not, but, on the contrary, recognizes him, and in the *Iphigenia Among Taurians*, where a sister is involved in a similar situation with a brother" (14).

In Aristotle's examples, tragic recognition is a matter of discovering unsuspected blood relationships or realizing after the fact that one has committed some horrendous crime. Nowhere does he say that the tragic plot must focus on the self-illumination of the hero. Some critics agree with Aristotle, insisting that our expectations about self-knowledge are not in the spirit of Greek tragedy.¹⁴ Others believe that Aristotle missed something of the essence of tragedy in not discussing the issue of self-recognition.¹⁵ For J.-P. Vernant, Oedipus's recognition "ne porte sur personne d'autre que sur Oedipe," and this recognition expresses a fundamental theme of tragedy: "Quand il veut, à la façon d'Oedipe, mener jusqu'au bout l'enquête sur ce qu'il est, l'homme se découvre énigmatique, sans consistance ni domaine qui lui soit propre, sans point d'attache fixe, sans essence définie, oscillant entre l'égal à dieu et l'égal à rien. Sa vraie grandeur consiste dans cela même qui

exprime sa nature d'énigme: l'interrogation" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 107, 131).

Wherever the truth lies in these debates, it is apparent that recognition in Greek tragedy, even in the case of *Oedipus*, is a more external process than what we encounter in modern drama. Among the ancients, subjectivity is derived by internalizing external structures, by discovering one's place in the order of the cosmos. Consciousness catches up belatedly with the inexorable and inscrutable march of destiny; the tragic hero discovers his role in the fateful unfolding of mythological action, "drama."

Critics of Racine are aware of the different dimension of recognition in his plays. Knight comments: "Racine n'a presque point pratiqué dans son théâtre de 'reconnaissances' au sens littéral d'Aristote; mais la formule 'reconnaissance par raisonnement' peut s'appliquer, comme le montre M. Vinaver, aux reconnaissances 'morales' aux 'odieuses lumières' répandues autour de Thésée et de tous ces grands criminels, qui créent eux-mêmes, par la lucidité que garde leur esprit après ou même avant leur acte, leur propre châtiment" (205).¹⁶

I would argue that self-recognition through confession is vital to Racine's conception of the tragic, and that this is apparent in the way he reworked his sources in *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*. In both of these plays, dramatic action is suspended on recognition scenes that are confessional. In each of these works, the innocence of one tragic victim and the guilt of another is determined, "recognized," through confession. In scenes that have no counterpart in the Greek originals, Iphigénie is saved by the miraculous substitution of a sacrificial victim who has incriminated herself confessionally, and Phèdre avows her own guilt as well as the innocence of Hippolyte. Confession is the basis of Racinian recognition, which Vinaver describes eloquently as "cette illumination des âmes livrées par leur propre raison à la plus terrible des découvertes: l'horreur de leurs actions" (50-51, emphasis added).

Let us consider first the case of *Iphigénie*. Racine changed the ending in favor of the type most admired by Aristotle, the conclusion in which the tragic deed is averted by recognition of the true identity of the victim. It was probably Euripides' *Iphigenia Among Taurians* that furnished Racine with this scene of a sacrifice narrowly avoided. But in *Iphigénie* this escape is the result not of a letter being dictated but of the revelation of Calchas. An instant before the innocent victim is to be sacrificed, he reveals that Eriphile, the "autre Iphigénie," must be

put to death in her place. He fulfills and explains two oracles at once—the one ordering Agamemnon to kill Iphigénie, and the “oracle effrayant” that kept the secret of Eriphile’s true identity.

Here we see that Racine has added a dimension entirely lacking in the original: Eriphile’s Oedipus-like quest for self-discovery. But the difference between Oedipus and Eriphile is that the latter’s search will be answered from within. In a sense, Calchas’s report concerning her actual birth is superficial. What has led her to the sacrificial pyre is her own passions: desire is destiny.

This is evident from her first appearance in the play. After mentioning the oracle that holds the riddle of her identity, she explains how the only man who knew her true parents perished in Achilles’s sack of Lesbos. This is where, symbolically, the fatality attached to her lineage was replaced by the real fatality that interests Racine, the encounter with Achilles:

Ce destructeur fatal des tristes Lesbiens,
Cet Achille, l’auteur de tes maux et des miens,
Dont la sanglante main m’enleva prisonnière,
Qui m’arracha d’un coup ma naissance et ton père,
De qui, jusques au nom, tout doit m’être odieux,
Est de tous les mortels le plus cher à mes yeux.

(471-76)

This is the fatal force that the oracle will merely confirm at the end of the play. The question of Eriphile’s identity is secondary to her passionate essence. She herself is honest enough to state this: “Voilà ce qui m’amène, et non l’impatience / D’apprendre à qui je dois une triste naissance” (521-22). Nonetheless, in disregarding Calchas’s power to reveal her origins, she puts herself in a position to be overtaken by his fateful revelations when she least expects it. For her, the sacrifice is the final sign of her violent and destructive passion for Achilles. It also turns out to be the revelation of her true identity, the guilty blood of Hélène confirming her guilty nature.

Phèdre reveals even more clearly the substitution of avowal for *anagnorisis*. In Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, the goddess Artemis is the instrument of recognition, appearing *ex machina* at the end of the play to reveal to Theseus the error he has made in killing his innocent son. In Racine’s play, *Phèdre* appears in person and makes her famous confession. It is a final moment of enlightenment for both herself and Thésée. It

brings to a conclusion the heroine's tortured search for knowledge and mastery over herself, and it brings about a reversal from ignorance to knowledge on the part of Thésée. The other decisive moment of *anagnorisis* in the play—the moment when Phèdre learns from Thésée that she has a rival—is also based on avowal. Thésée reports Hippolyte's confession made on bended knee: "Je confesse à vos pieds ma véritable offense" (1121). He finds it absurd and unconvincing, but for Phèdre it is a stunning reversal and revelation: "Qui l'eût cru?" she demands of Oenone. Ironically, Hippolyte's confession keeps Thésée in the dark while providing his wife with the devastating truth that had eluded her.

Neither of these scenes has an equivalent in Euripides, in whose play the truth and the destiny of the subject is fatally determined by the gods. Avowal in the place of *anagnorisis* denotes ethical and aesthetic differences between the two cultures, which we will explore in more detail shortly. By resurrecting and altering the Greek masterpieces, Racine has forged a cultural composite that allies tragic recognition with confession. Cast in an Athenian setting, what is undeniably the Christian discourse of confession becomes *anagnorisis*. The truth of confession eludes the hero until the dramatic moment when it bursts forth like a tragic *anagnorisis*: irreversible, implacable, "funeste."

PHÈDRE: "LA FILLE DE MINOS ET DE PASIPHAË"

Probably the most famous line from *Phèdre* because it expresses so poetically the opposition between civilization and desire in Phèdre's ancestry, the verse "La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë" also signifies Racine's originality as much as it does his poetic brilliance. It is the logical place to begin a study of his profound reworking of the myth. The daughter of Pasiphaë, the love-stricken victim of Venus, had already been created by Euripides, but the daughter of Minos, who foresees confessing to her father after death—this is entirely of Racine's making. In the Greek play Minos is not even mentioned, and in Seneca he is the still-living father of Phaedra, not the judge of Hades. Only in Racine do we encounter a Minos similar to Dante's, a vindictive judge who exacts confessions as a form of punishment.

Racine has created a Phèdre living in a mixed universe of Greek and Christian elements where the necessity to confess can become as tragic a destiny as any imagined by the ancient tragedians. Each time the daughter of Pasiphaë confesses, willingly or not, she advances a

step closer to death and the ultimate eschatological scene of avowal. By adding the dimension of Minos-confessor-of-the-Underworld to the play, Racine has envisioned a specifically modern and Christian divinity who destroys his Phèdre just as assuredly as Venus did his Greek predecessor's. In his version of the play, it is as much Minos "à sa proie attaché" as it is Venus.

Minos and Thésée

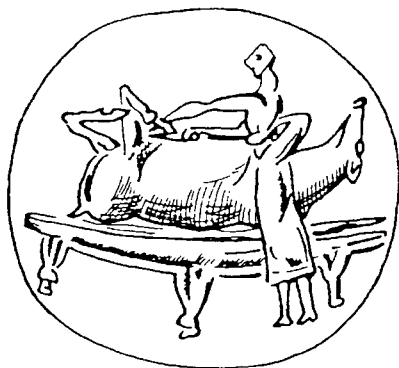
Minos is the generic name of all the kings of Crete, a civilization that preceded and dominated the Mycenaean mainland Greeks during the Bronze Age. The myths of the abduction of Europa by Zeus and the killing of the Minotaur by Theseus are what one scholar calls a "wedding of Greek and Cretan elements" (Nichols 121). They are Mycenaean accounts of the origins of Minoan civilization and its eventual absorption by that of the mainland Greeks, a process that began with the invasion of Crete sometime around 1450. It is believed that a succession of Mycenaean Minoses occupied the palace of Knossos and presided over the gradual appropriation of the island's indigenous culture. Words like *Knossos*, *Minos*, and *Labyrinthos* are of non-Greek origin, and they denote different religious and political practices. In the legends that survive, we can appreciate the cultural rivalry between Greece and Crete and the reworking of these authentic Cretan elements into the patterns of mainland mythology. Homer's Minos, for example, is a thoroughly civilized Greek overlord, whose grandson, Idomeneus, leads part of the expedition to Troy.¹⁷

Looking into the myth and interpreting it in the light of current archaeological and anthropological evidence gives us a sense of the foreign elements in Cretan culture which the Theseus legend sought to tame. The religious practices, the sexuality, and the political order of Crete were a stage of civilization which the Greeks conquered and suppressed through the exploits of the Athenian hero Theseus. The legend indicates that Crete was the terrifying land of bull worship, human sacrifice, and sexual depravity, housed in the fearful architecture of the Labyrinth. The research of contemporary historians of religion sheds further light on the Minoan religion and its architectural expression:

The bull was the sacrificial animal *par excellence* in accordance with a tradition deeply rooted in the Near Eastern past; at the

end of acrobatic bull games it must have been put to death with a double axe, probably in the central court of the palace. As for human sacrifice, in the absence of any incontestable data, one can only observe that the Cretans seem to have practiced it in one form or another, if the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur is to be believed. (Pelon 36)

The word *labyrinth* means literally "house of the double axe"; thus the palace of Crete draws its name from the instrument used in its religious sacrifices. Marianne Nichols gives a description of the Minoan sacred palace, illustrated by an engraving, which suggests why the mainland Greeks looked upon the Labyrinth with foreboding:



Palaces all over Crete are characterized by the same or similar architectural features. One in the little town of Gournia contains a small room off its court paved with blocks of stone. In one particularly large block a strange hole runs obliquely through the entire thickness. It has reminded several scholars of the tables or platforms, depicted on gemstones and sarcophagi, on which bulls were trussed for sacrifice. Their blood probably was conveyed through the hole into a ritual vessel, just as the gemstone design shows. (Nichols 141)

The Labyrinth was a sacred slaughterhouse, and the legend attests that it once was the site of human sacrifice.¹⁸

The legends also make it clear that Crete was originally identified with sexual practices that disturbed the Greeks. Bestiality, homosexuality, and murder are associated with the royal bed.¹⁹ In the myth,

Minos calls upon Poseidon to produce a miracle to prove his right to the throne of Crete, and the sea god obliges by making a bull emerge from the ocean. Minos's woes begin, however, when he refuses to sacrifice the bull to Poseidon. His wife has intercourse with the bull and gives birth to the Minotaur, who feeds on human flesh. The original fault and the ensuing sexual misconduct of Pasiphaë were caused by a refusal to sacrifice the bull, and the Minotaur himself survives on human sacrifice. Thus the Cretan regime is a cycle of disordered sexuality and monstrosity sanctioned by sacrifice.

Theseus, the hero of Athenian civilization, puts an end to the cruel sacrificial order. Exhibiting the wisdom of Athena, he solves the riddle of the Labyrinth, kills the Minotaur, and abducts King Minos's daughter. Poseidon finishes the task by destroying the Labyrinth with an earthquake.

Euripides' and Racine's tragedies, however, deal with the aftermath of Theseus's heroic deeds. According to the legend, his return home was marred by the death of his father, who plunged into the sea when he saw the black flag on his son's ship instead of the white one signifying the success of the mission. Euripides deals with the persecution of Theseus's household by Venus. Minos is a dead issue; his name doesn't even figure in the play. Seneca mentions the king, but he is the still-living father of Phaedra. The Nurse brings up his name in an attempt to frighten Phaedra away from her lustful crime. Only Racine evokes the ancient myth of Minos-judge-of-the-Underworld. The defeated monarch returns in Racine's play to haunt the conscience of his daughter. He emerges as a rival king and father figure who exacts a measure of revenge on his former rival. He represents an underworld of passion and discourse which the Athenian hero is tragically unable to govern.

To summarize the situation, there are three civilizations and three paternal orders represented in Racine's play:

1. Archaic Crete, with its murderous libidinous father who earned his royal name and his right to the throne by sacrificing to Poseidon. He succeeds himself in an incestuous repetition of the same name: one Minos after another reigns in Knossos. In the forbidden city, which according to legend was built with no outer walls to contain it, the most fundamental boundaries of Mycenaean civilization are transgressed. There is even no clear-cut cultural distinction between the royal name and that of the animal kingdom. The king's name is fused with the Minotaur, the word being an amalgam of Minos and *tauros*,

"bull." At certain prescribed moments, the king reaffirms his power by becoming the totemic animal to which bloody sacrifices are made.²⁰

2. The Athens of Theseus, with its "superbes remparts que Minerve a bâtis" (360). Here the name of the father is synonymous with the Law and the repression of the instincts. The chaste Hippolytus can succeed his father by acquiring the name of hero, by destroying the monster of disordered desire. He sets out on the heroic quest, only to discover that the monster is really in his father's court. It is Phèdre, who wages a losing battle against sexuality, first by means of the repressive offering to Venus, which fails, and finally by recourse to confession.

3. Racine's own world, which is founded on the figure of Minos-the-infernal-judge. In Racine's Christianized version of the myth, Minos's name is synonymous with confession. This is the name of the father that Phèdre pronounces in act 4, scene 6: "Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains" (1280). This is the father figure who presides over the destiny of Phèdre and who orders her to confess her crime, not conceal it like Euripides' heroine.

Thésée is incapable of assuming this role of father and priest-king. His own name and presence produce the interdiction and inarticulation of desire. When Hippolyte finally does confess, Thésée makes an erroneous interpretation. From our perspective, the play is a tragic collision between the paternal laws of Thésée and Minos. Racine reanimates the ancient myth to represent a tragic conflict in the sacred foundations of his own political order. In distinction to the Cornelian syntheses we have studied, Racine sees tragic incompatibilities between, to paraphrase Pascal, *la raison d'Etat* and *la raison du coeur*.²¹

Talking Cures

"Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal qu'elle me cache" (146). Phèdre's first avowal is prompted by what amounts to suicide prevention on the part of her nurse, Oenone. It is the kind of conversation that might take place in our own world on a skyscraper window ledge, over the telephone, or in an analyst's office. Phèdre is in the final phases of starving herself to death, so the avowal is a therapeutic measure, an attempt to prolong life by substituting a speech act for an act of self-destruction. The theory behind such interventions, then as now, is that the one can be exchanged for the other because suicide is really a desperate attempt to send a message where the normal means of human communication have failed.

A similar situation, though less critical, was played out in the opening scenes between Hippolyte and his guardian, Thérémène. Exactly ten lines before Oenone's observation, Thérémène had addressed almost the same formula to Hippolyte: "Vous périssez d'un mal que vous dissimulez" (136). He senses that his charge is embarking on a potentially self-destructive journey in an attempt to equal his father's heroic exploits and earn the right to sexual autonomy, "le droit de faillir comme lui" (100).

There is nothing exclusively Christian about this kind of talking cure. When an ascetic like Tertullian or St. Basil compares confession to a medical consultation by which hidden diseases are brought to light and cured, he is repeating an aphorism known in the pagan philosophical sects (Vacandard 862). Galen speaks of the medical benefits of exposing one's troubles to others. The Pythagorean *Golden Verses* advises self-examination, and Plutarch writes in the *De perfectibus in virtute* that "there are many sick people who accept doctors, and others who refuse them. The man who hides the shame of his soul, his desire, his unpleasantness, his avarice, his concupiscence, has little chance of making progress" (qtd. in Foucault, "About the Beginnings" 1:9; see also Dodds, *Pagan and Christian* 28). In Euripides we find the same notion. The Nurse says to Phaedra: "If your trouble is one of the unmentionable passions, there are women to help you out. If your affliction can be communicated to men, speak and your case can be referred to physicians" (73).²²

However, the difference between pagan and Christian confessional discourse will soon become apparent in Racine's play. The pagan practice is purely cathartic and stays within the confines of medical discourse. The Greek nurse proposes a remedy for Phaedra's illness: "There are charms and soothing spells. . . . I have at home a philtre, a soothing charm for love which will put an end to this malady neither on disgraceful terms nor injury to your mind" (76). With Phaedra's approval, the Nurse gives Hippolytus a love potion. If the potion works, an episode or two of forbidden pleasure will cure the queen of her lovesickness. Nothing so "hygienic" is possible in Racine's play. Confession is the only cure, but one that betrays doctor and patient, transformed symbolically into the poison that slowly kills Phèdre as she makes her last confession.²³

The famous description of passion's effects on the mind and body which Phèdre gives in her confession is an interesting synthesis of many sources. The physiology of passion, "Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue," is borrowed from Ovid and ultimately derived from Sappho.²⁴

Among the effects of passion are blindness and aphasia: "Je ne pouvais parler" (275). The Athenian law of shame and repression interdicts Phèdre's speech and sight. She seeks relief in the sacred, first by covering Venus's altar with sacrificial offerings: "De victimes moi-même à toute heure entourée, / Je cherchais dans leurs flancs ma raison égarée" (281–82). The same sort of sacrificial augury referred to in *Iphigénie* proves ineffective against the passions.

Next, in a passage without parallel in the classical sources, Phèdre employs a technique that looks to us like Christian prayer:

En vain sur les autels ma main brûlait l'encens:
Quand ma bouche implorait le nom de la Déesse,
J'adorais Hippolyte; et le voyant sans cesse,
Même au pied des autels que je faisais fumer,
J'offrais tout à ce Dieu que je n'osais nommer.
(284–88)

The autobiographies of seventeenth-century mystics like Marie de l'Incarnation contain similar accounts of pious meditations being transformed into visions of temptation. Roland Villeneuve describes how Soeur Jeanne des Anges, the key witness in the Loudun possession trials, was unable to pray because her mind kept drifting to her demonic tempter: "[Elle] fut saisie d'amour pour Grandier tout le temps de l'oraison, ne pouvant appliquer son esprit à autre chose qu'à la représentation qui lui était faite intérieurement de la personne de Grandier" (74).²⁵

We also learn in this passage that Phèdre has regained the use of her sight and her voice by recourse to the sacred. According to Lacan, this is the function of religious discourse; like psychoanalysis, it allows human desire to address its voice to the Other, the true *destinataire* of the demand. Thus this passage already poses the problem of Phèdre's desire in seventeenth-century terms: sacrificial offerings, love potions, or suicide are her options in Theseus's Troezen, but mental prayer and confession to Oenone are the beginnings of a different discourse of the passions than that imagined by Euripides or Seneca.

Shame

Yet another key distinction between Racine and Euripides concerns the ethic of shame, which dominates the Greek play from one end to the other. In the opening avowal scene, Racine's Phèdre seems to be

following the same code: "Je meurs pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste." Stating her passion will only compound her shame; at the end of her first confession she concludes: "Je t'ai tout avoué . . . / Pourvu que de ma mort respectant les approches, / Tu ne m'affliges plus par d'injustes reproches" (312-24). The Greek Phaedra explains her decision in the same terms: "There you have my reason for killing myself: the desire to spare my husband and children the shame" (76). The concern over preserving her name and that of her children will inspire all the actions of Euripides' heroine. She commits suicide and calumniates Hippolytus in a posthumous letter all to avoid shame. By the end of Racine's play, and even before, we will discover the opposing Christian concept of the *merit of shame*.

The Labyrinth

"On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous" (584, emphasis added). These are the first words that Phèdre addresses to Hippolyte. Thésée is absent, presumed dead; in place of the father's negative law there are only rumors. Phèdre assures her stepson that the father is dead: "On ne voit point deux fois le rivage des morts" (623). Equally credible rumors maintain, however, that Thésée is alive: "Un bruit sourd veut que le Roi respire" (627). In this state of affairs, repressed desire feels authorized to speak, and Phèdre first steps over the line by declaring that the absent king breathes only in his surviving son: "Il n'est point mort, puisqu'il respire en vous" (627). Thus begins Phèdre's mythopoetic descent into the Labyrinth in which she re-creates the legend to suit Hippolyte's and her own desire.

The Labyrinth was the sacred palace of the Minoan dynasty, the place where violence and desire were held in check by sacrifice. The word Labyrinth is now associated with the legend of Thésée. For Hippolyte it has become an obstacle to his own desire. As long as he has not slain a monster or sacked a city, the Labyrinth will continue to symbolize his own belittlement next to his father and the silence he must impose on his own desires. Phèdre likewise must follow the same law, but in her confession she brings the figure of the Labyrinth back to life. It becomes the architectural occasion for Hippolyte to become a hero and for her own desire to declare itself:

Par vous aurait péri le monstre de la Crète,
Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite.

Pour en développer l'embarras incertain,
 Ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.
 Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée:
 L'amour m'en eût d'abord inspiré la pensée.
 C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
 Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.

(649-56)

The deliberate association between the body of Hippolyte and that of his father, and the remaking of the myth whereby Hippolyte conquers the Labyrinth, are elements that Racine has borrowed from Seneca, but with the verse "Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée," Racine's Phèdre imagines her own version of the myth. This is where the plan, "ce dessein," becomes Phèdre's own artistic reconstruction of the myth. She enters the Labyrinth without the guiding thread:

Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre amante.
 Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher,
 Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher;
 Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue
 Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.

(658-62)

"Ce dessein" also is the moment when Phèdre's declaration passes from artistic fantasy to present, active declaration of love. The demonstrative adjective "ce" indicates both past plan for taking the Labyrinth and present fantasy in which Phèdre's desire is actively stating itself. "Ce" refers to the present reanimation of the myth with Phèdre as author and autobiographical subject of the legend. From obstacle of desire, the Labyrinth has been transformed by Phèdre into a confessional space where the ancient architecture of Crete again serves as a palace for disordered desire.

Psychoanalytic critics, with their juridical, repressive view of civilization, tend to interpret the Labyrinth as a symbol of repression and Phèdre's avowals as an overcoming of repression. Thus Francesco Orlando actually draws a diagram in which the forces of civilization oppose each other in a series of binary pairs: the Labyrinth encloses the Minotaur just as "secret" restrains "confession" (35). From this point of view, confession can only be understood as a breaking through of the repressed, the momentary triumph of a natural force over its

institutional barriers. I would say that the situation is more complex. In the passage above, the symbol of the Labyrinth actually facilitates confession. It is an object with a triple symbolic meaning within the play: for Minoan civilization it signifies transgression and sacrifice, for Thésée it is indeed the symbol of repression, but for Racine's own reworking of the myth it signifies pastoral power, an injunction to put desire into words. In Phèdre's declaration to Hippolyte, confession is indeed transgressive, but as the play develops, confession will show itself to be part of the apparatus of civilization, it will compel its tragic victim to conform to its law.

Roland Barthes does more justice to the ambivalence of confession in the play. In his paradoxical formulas, confession seems to resist being characterized univocally as transgression of the law:

Phèdre est sur tous les plans une tragédie de la Parole enfermée, de la Vie retenue. Car la parole est un substitut de la vie: parler, c'est perdre la vie, et toutes les conduites d'épanchement sont senties dans un premier mouvement comme des gestes de dilapidation: par l'aveu, par la parole dénouée, c'est le principe même de la vie qui semble s'en aller; parler, c'est se répandre, c'est-à-dire, se châtrer. (*Sur Racine* 112)

The final characterization, the equivalency between speech and castration is, however, orthodox Lacanianism. Foucault's position, to which I subscribe, is that paternal interdiction and negativity do not reign over all declarations of desire. Avowal is not always castration but rather salvation, liberation, healing, and so on; that is why the subject submits to its enticements so willingly.

Perhaps the best way of characterizing confession in *Phèdre* is to say that it is a polyvalent discourse and that Racine derives many of the tragic effects of his play by contrasting the protagonists' expectations of what avowal is accomplishing from what it actually does. There is a performative ambiguity about confession that escapes each of the characters and eventually destroys them. Avowal as uncertain performance and inexorable fate: "Cet aveu que je te viens de faire, / Cet aveu si honteux, le crois-tu volontaire?" (693-94).

This dimension is evident in the unforeseen shift that occurs in the declaration scene under consideration. Phèdre begins her speech with no intention of admitting her love, but drawn into the fantasy of the Labyrinth she declares her passion. Hippolyte tries to repress what he has heard by invoking the paternal name: "Madame, oubliez-vous /

Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux" (663–64). Phèdre reacts with a quick improvisation upon her avowal, signaled by a shift to the "tu" form: "Ah! cruel, tu m'as trop entendue" (671). Instead of offering Hippolyte a transgression, she now appeals to his puritanical conscience, wallowing in self-contempt: "Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime, / Innocente à mes yeux, je m'approuve moi-même" (676–77). Now she is no longer the "adjuvant" but rather the "opposant," the dragon the hero must slay:²⁶

Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui t'irrite.

.
Voilà mon coeur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper.
Impatient déjà d'expié son offense,
Au devant de ton bras je le sens qui s'avance.

(701, 704–6)

The Merit of Shame

With the mention of expiation (705), Phèdre avails herself of another tactic within confessional discourse—the Christian notion of the merit of shame. We recall that all of the Greek heroine's actions were directed at avoiding shame. Racine's Phèdre would seem to start out in such an ethical mode in act 1, but after confessing to Hippolyte, a distorted notion of expiation, something mistakenly akin to the monks' idea of "the salutary confession," presents itself to her. "J'ai déclaré ma honte aux yeux de mon vainqueur, / Et l'espoir, malgré moi, s'est glissé dans mon coeur" (767–68). Against all evidence, the daughter of Minos thinks that her confession and prostration has somehow touched Hippolyte. For a moment she seems to believe that her avowal has redeemed her incestuous desire. "Hope" fills her heart. In a deluded appeal to the merit of shame, she dreams of seducing Hippolyte. This transgressive, erotic use of shame will be reversed in the final scene of the play, when Phèdre voluntarily endures the shame of avowal to truly expiate her crime.

Thésée: The Blindness of Kings

Nous l'avons vu, ni le Roi, ni la Police qui l'a relayé à cette place, n'étaient capables de la lire parce que cette place comportait l'aveuglement.

LACAN, ECRITS

When Thésée returns and tries to verify the accusations against Hippolyte, his royal insight proves to be tragically unequal to the task. Unlike the Cornelian monarch, Racine's tragic king is incapable of becoming "le roi des coeurs." This is because his presence enforces the paternal law of repression and his methods of investigation are too narrowly juridical.

He is greeted by silence; both Phèdre and Hippolyte refuse to speak about the scandal hanging over the household. In the absence of any testimony from the two concerned parties, Thésée is only too ready to believe the accusatory deposition of Oenone and, above all, what seems to him like the most damning *material* evidence, the sword, which he designates metonymically as "le fer": "J'ai reconnu le fer, instrument de sa rage" (1011). Thésée lacks diacritical insight because he is overly confident that everything in his court is immediately visible to his royal gaze. He sees things from the perspective of "la place du roi."²⁷ Thus Hippolyte's sword has only one meaning, the one previously assigned to it by Thésée: "Ce fer dont je l'armai pour un plus noble usage" (1012). The sword, which is in reality the metaphor of royal, paternal power, is decreed a thing by Thésée's monarchical vision. It is supposed to be used, not signify. For Racine, as for the Lacan of the *Séminaire sur la lettre volée*, the king is, by his very position, incapable of seeing the Symbolic order.

This blindness persists in Thésée's interrogations of Hippolyte and Aricie. The omnipotence of the king's gaze continues to be affirmed throughout the investigation, but a note of exasperation and unintended irony can be heard in his declaration. At the sight of Hippolyte the king cries:

Quel oeil ne serait pas trompé comme le mien?
Faut-il que sur le front d'un profane adultère
Brille de la vertu le sacré caractère?
Et ne devrait-on pas à des signes certains
Reconnaître le coeur des perfides humains?

(1036–40)

These lines express Thésée's certainty that his eye is still master of the situation, but they also convey his anxiety about the divorce between the outward phenomenological world and the inner truths of the heart. They are a demand and, as the case will turn out, a plea that signs reduce themselves to unequivocal phenomena. Here Racine is follow-

ing the Greek text closely, which seems fitting, since here Thésée seems quintessentially Athenian in his demand that things submit to reason and clarity.

The final proof of Thésée's inability to exercise pastoral power occurs when his son does in fact confess the actual facts of the case. After much hesitation, Hippolyte reveals that the reason for his shame and guilt is that he loves Aricie, a forbidden object for political reasons. But Thésée rejects the avowal completely: "Mais non, l'artifice est grossier. / Tu te feins criminel pour te justifier" (1127–28). Thésée prefers material evidence and third-party accusations; the subjective discourse of confession is an "artifice" that cannot alter his sense of justice. Hippolyte opposes the two terms: "Elle vous paraît fausse et pleine d'artifice. / Phèdre au fond de son coeur me rend plus de justice" (1137–38). He is alluding to a kind of judgment capable of reconciling artifice and justice, capable of penetrating to the blind, intuitive level of the heart.

Toward the end, Thésée seems to be nearing an intimation of this order of justice; he asks himself: "Quelle plaintive voix crie au fond de mon coeur? / Une pitié secrète et m'afflige et m'étonne" (1456–57). He is near the kind of breakthrough that enabled Auguste to descend into himself and pardon the conspirators, but before he can retract the curse on his son's head, he hears the news that Hippolyte is nothing more than a "corps défiguré, / Triste objet, où des Dieux triomphe la colère, / Et que méconnaîtrait l'oeil même de son père" (1568–70). Thésée's royal eye has had the last word. The son is finally reduced to an object, but one so disfigured, so devoid of the uniquely human signs of the heart which can't appear on the face, that the father can no longer discern the son. The situation is in many respects a filial version of the Uzès story: "Et jamais fille (fils) ne fut plus fille (fils)."

The Name of the Father

In order for Thésée to realize a complete *anagnorisis* in the Racinian manner, Phèdre must make a final confession to him in person. In the Greek play, Artemis appears *ex machina* to reveal the truth to Theseus. The ethic of shame predominates, and the heroine tries to preserve her honor by accusing Hippolytus of the crime in a note and hanging herself. There is an intertextual velleity of this gesture in Racine: "Elle a trois fois écrit; et changeant de pensée, / Trois fois elle a rompu sa lettre commencée" (1477–78). Suicide and dissimulation were

acceptable solutions in the Greek world, but Racine's *Phèdre* is in the grip of Minos; she is arrested in the middle of her evil designs by the name of a father whose law is confession, not repression:

Où me cacher? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
 Mais que dis-je? mon père y tient l'urne fatale;
 Le Sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses sévères mains:
 Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.
 Ah! combien frémira son ombre épouvantée,
 Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée,
 Contrainte d'avouer tant de forfaits divers,
 Et des crimes peut-être inconnus aux enfers!
 Que diras-tu, mon père, à ce spectacle horrible?
 Je crois voir de ta main tomber l'urne terrible;
 Je crois te voir, cherchant un supplice nouveau,
 Toi-même de ton sang devenir le bourreau.

(1277-88)

R. C. Knight, the most hellenizing of Racine's critics, points out the anachronism of this vision: "Jamais, je crois, dans la tragédie grecque, aucun héros n'a craint les supplices infernaux. . . . Les Enfers qu'entrevoit *Phèdre* sont donc, à l'insu peut-être de Racine, en réalité l'enfer des chrétiens" (347-48). I would add that the most specifically Christian feature of this hell is the use of enforced confession to establish guilt and carry out punishment. *Phèdre*'s conscience is troubled by a typically Jansenist vision of hell in which the hapless soul is caught unready for final judgment and forced to contemplate its sins. Her words recall almost textually the descriptions of Nicole cited earlier in this chapter.

"Je crois te voir, cherchant un supplice nouveau, / Toi-même de ton sang devenir le bourreau." Minos has become the persecutor of his own blood. He has supplanted Venus as the avenging deity who directs *Phèdre*'s fate. His prescriptions will determine the end of the play, which is radically different from that of Euripides or Seneca. The law of Minos dictates that *Phèdre*'s good name must be sacrificed to the higher ethic of truth and self-revelation.

Phèdre in the Confessional

"Je consens que mes yeux soient toujours abusés" (1599). Like Oedipus, Thésée finally obtains tragic insight only when he is voluntarily

blinded. He has just heard Thérémène's account of Hippolyte's death, and in his heart he suspects that his son was innocent, "un cruel soupçon, / L'excusant dans mon coeur, m'alarme avec raison!" (1596–97). But at this point, Thésée surrenders all of his critical insight to Phèdre. He wants no more elucidation of his own blindness and complicity in his son's death. The king hands over judgment to Phèdre's accusation: "Je le crois criminel, puisque vous l'accusez" (1600). But there will be no accusation; by closing his eyes, Thésée has unknowingly prepared himself to hear Phèdre's confession. The stage is finally set for the Imaginary order of vision to be chastised and the truths of the heart to be revealed.

In her brief confession, Phèdre outlines this movement from guilty vision to ascetic blindness and insight: "C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux / Osai jeter un oeil profane, incestueux" (1623–24). In the Augustinian tradition, human vision is "corporeal vision," error and concupiscence. For Phèdre and Thésée, unaided human vision culminated in incest, calumny, and the murder of Hippolyte.

Phèdre assigns ample blame in the crime to the hostile gods and the pernicious influence of Oenone, but her final lines place the blame squarely on herself. Within Jansenism, no matter how compelled a creature was to commit a crime, he or she was still held fully accountable. Her final words bring to a conclusion the entire confessional logic of the play:

J'ai voulu, devant vous exposant mes remords,
Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts.
J'ai pris, j'ai fait couler dans mes brûlantes veines
Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes.

(1635–38)

These lines refer back to the medical imagery of the first confessional scene and they resolve the issue of shame. Both are radically different from the Greek and Latin sources. The Greek Phèdre died to avoid shame, whereas Racine's heroine deliberately exposes her shame to Thésée. For the Christian there is merit in shame for the individual and for all of society. The shame of Phèdre's confession is the beginning of her personal expiation, which will continue in the afterlife, and it also helps restore order and justice in Athens. Phèdre's confession will close the book on Hippolyte's murder: "D'une action si noire / Que ne peut avec elle, expirer la mémoire" (1646–47). Once confessed, the crime is effaced, covered by the seal of secrecy, the *sigillum*.

The word "expirer" occurs here for the third time in the space of nine lines, and it links the memory of the crime to the last exhalations of Phèdre's confession. Phèdre herself is the first to employ the word: "Déjà jusqu'à mon coeur le venin parvenu / Dans ce coeur expirant jette un froid inconnu" (1639–40). The effect of the poison is to chill her expiring heart. This brings to a conclusion the medical metaphor for confession introduced in the first act, based on Euripides. But the medical use of confession is completely revised by Racine. In the Greek play it was a way of buying time while a love potion could be prepared for Hippolytus. Here the talking cure is the only cure, and its action coincides exactly with the poison Phèdre has ingested. Confession is the cure for love; it extends life, but it is a poison that kills Phèdre and all of those who believed in its powers.

Déjà je ne vois plus qu'à travers un nuage
 Et le ciel et l'époux que ma présence outrage;
 Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
 Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.

(1641–44)

Finally, Phèdre's blindness corresponds with Thésée's. The two are truly in a confessional, separated by a curtain of darkness that now descends over Phèdre's eyes. The poison of confession has finally taken away her guilty vision. She continues to speak, and, as she says, "Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts." The slower path to Minos's kingdom is the verbal descent of her confession. Her last moments of consciousness are rendered in perfect alexandrines. The confessional poison has chilled her heart and darkened her vision; thus blinded she can name for Thésée what they both never saw: "pureté," the paradoxical purity beyond phenomenality which Hippolyte had poetically indicated to Thésée: "Le jour n'est pas plus pur que le fond de mon coeur" (1112).

Conclusion

CONFESSIONS AND COMMUNITIES

In this study we have followed the vicissitudes of a discourse that, according to Michel Foucault, runs through Western civilization "de Tertullien à Freud." I have sought to substantiate this claim for a certain historical period. My success or failure depends on the plausibility of my *rapprochements* between the language of psychoanalysis and that of Christian confession. If Freud, Lacan, Tertullian, and St. François de Sales practice the same discourse or, to use Freud's metaphor for psychoanalysis, are on the same historical telephone line, then we should be able to make the connection, exchange signals among the different confessional discourses. The reader must feel that the same message has been transcoded from the past up to the present.

My other objective, however, has been to respect the historical specificity of the cultures under investigation. History is the study of *identities* between present and past, but also of *differences*. It is the *same* discourse that runs from Tertullian to Freud, but it is always different. At each moment it combines in a unique way with other historical givens to form a confessional *dispositif*. We have studied four such *dispositifs*: (1) early Christian *exomologesis*, (2) monastic *exagoreusis*, (3) Dante's medieval confession, and (4) the court society confessional. In each case, the same obligation to represent the self has produced a unique confessional literature and community.

In the *De penitentia*, Tertullian orders his followers in the primitive Christian community to undergo *exomologesis* or *publicatio sui* to expiate three grave sins: murder, adultery, or idolatry. It is a public penance in which the sinner "*exchanges* the sins which he has committed for

severe treatment" (qtd. in Watkins 1:115, emphasis added). Transgressions are undone by representation; the body of the sinner is the expressive signifier that he uses to "publish" his spiritual death and thereby earn a chance to be reborn spiritually. After a period of "doing penance," the bodily mortification is lifted and the sinner is welcomed back into the Church. This confessional *dispositif* produced a collective, public sense of the self and a binding together of the members of the community. It is the ancestor to all forms of group therapy which use inclusion and exclusion to produce a *prise de conscience* by the individual.

Tertullian's explanation of penance as symbolic substitution for sin is almost identical to Freud's definition of the symptom: "A symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance" (20:91). For Tertullian, the "instinctual satisfaction" is sin, which can be eradicated, undone by its symbolic exchange for "severe treatment." Freud would doubtless categorize *exomologesis* as a specific kind of symptom: undoing (*ungeschehenmachen*), typical of obsessional neurosis.¹ But I hope to have learned something about psychoanalysis by reversing this reductive comparison and asking: Is psychoanalysis like *exomologesis*?

Following Foucault's "de Tertullien à Freud," I have sought to show that psychoanalysis manipulates and controls bodies just as assuredly as did Tertullian's *exomologesis*, that although neurosis has been exchanged for sin and words for acts, psychoanalysis is just as ritualistic and coercive as was early Christian confession. To submit to analysis, and to think that it is a scientifically objective and liberating discovery of the "truth," is to be blind historically to the fact that throughout the history of the Christian West, men and women have been forced to live their bodies in certain ways. From its origins, Christianity taught its adherents to live the body as a theater of sin, and it is this body that Freud encountered in his patients—they were involuntary ascetics, whose symptoms he would relieve through avowal.

The creative turn of psychoanalysis was to claim to be a liberation from the ascetic system, a freeing of the body from its repressive expiations and symptoms. But in instituting his practice, Freud placed his patients under the same Christian obligation to tell the truth with the body, and he founded a clinical procedure that invokes the same quasi-magical power of representation to heal and cure which was the basis of confession. Patient and doctor, like priest and penitent, communicate with an unconscious or spiritual agency without ever completely

understanding its operation. The ego comes over into the id but does not explicate or eradicate it.

The next group whose social organization was influenced by confession were the monastic communities of fourth-century Egypt and Syria. They were a spiritual elite, and their confessional practices were aimed at eradicating sin in its most subtle, mental origins, as opposed to the grave sins treated by *exomologesis*. The *exagoreusis* of these Desert Fathers is much closer to Freud's technique.

It uses speech as both diagnosis and cure. By the "agon" of confession the monk gains insight into his unconscious spiritual life and defeats the demon. Almost every aspect of the psychoanalytic unconscious is foreshadowed in the monastic model of the psyche. Conscious life is governed by somatic drives and unconscious forces. Thoughts and dreams must be analyzed to reveal their true hidden meaning. A subtle poetics of thought interpretation pays close attention to the formal aspects of the signifier and the contradictory logic of the unconscious. The gifted spiritual father decides whether thoughts are from the self, God, or the devil, and he heals the confessant with his divinely inspired words. "Speak a word for my salvation" is the oft-repeated demand of the disciple in the apothegms of the Desert Fathers.

The monks believed that the unconscious was moved by demons and angels. For Freud, repressed biographical and familial events were the catalysts of the unconscious thought process. Apart from this distinction the two psychic models are remarkably similar. Sociologically, what is instructive about the monks' discourse is that it was meant to indicate total obedience and humility, a surrender of the mind to the authority of a superior. A "perfect union" was formed between the spiritual father and the spiritual child by means of confession. The monks were thus aware that the knowledge exchanged in confession gave rise to a relation of dominance and submission.

There are several paradoxical aspects of this system which should be food for thought in any discussion of confession and society: (1) The most efficacious and domineering paternal order ever invented was founded, not on repression, but on expression of desire. (2) The power to interpret thoughts and to forgive is a potent collectivizing force. To bind or to loose is always to bind. One is reminded of Berenger's struggle against the slightest admission of guilt in resisting group hysteria in Ionesco's *Rhinocéros*: "Il ne faut pas avoir de remords. Le sentiment de la culpabilité est dangereux!" (198). Also, what seems

the most individualizing of rituals, since it makes the monk recognize himself as a solitary subject of desire, leads to a state of total group solidarity. Thus confession ends up being the most social of discourses. The individual and society are projections of a single social reality. Society cannot be conceived except as a collection of voices, and the individual has no existence except as a subject of enunciation. The individual must recognize himself in "les mots de la tribu," and the tribe exists only as a network of communicating individuals.

A quite different confessional *dispositif* was in place by the thirteenth century. What the Church lost in intensity and intimate communal spirit it gained in extension and scale. The Lateran decree imposed auricular confession, in theory at least, on every living soul in Europe. From persecuted counterculture, the Church had become an empire, *the* universal agent in sacred History. Confession was now a ritual that helped define a global community. For this reason, Dante illustrates most clearly the implications of the Lateran decree. In his poem, all of humanity is subjected to the obligation to confess, as they enter either Hell or Purgatory. His vision is universal. Accompanied by Virgil, the poet of the Roman "imperium sine fine," he imagines a new world order at the heart of which is confession.

The Scholastic theory of the sacrament of penance has a key role to play in Dante's vision of the afterlife. As the souls enter Hell, they must confess to Minos, who bases their eternal punishment on their avowals. As Dante visits each circle in the Inferno, it is also clear that the punishments themselves are ironic interpretations of the lost souls' confessions. It is a perverse illustration of the Scholastic doctrine that the voice was the *determinata materia ad significandam* of confession. The constant association between speech and punishment in Hell is probably also related to Dante's own theoretical statements in the *De vulgari eloquentia* that speech is the distinguishing characteristic of man. In Hell, salutary confession becomes "bestial segno."

As the *dramatis personae* of the *Comedy* are compelled to confess, they are organized and hierarchized into groups of sinners. They are subjected to a feudal chain of command. Only those in Heaven have a direct rapport with the Divine King; the rest are dealt with by intermediary angels or devils. Their lives are characterized by the public sociability of the Middle Ages. Whether in Hell or in Purgatory, their daily lives are essentially public and collective. Only the poet's own confession is a relatively private moment. The moral code that underlies Dante's afterlife reserves its worst punishments for those who have

violated the personal bonds of feudalism. The "peccator carnali" are confined to the first circle of Hell proper, whereas those who have betrayed sacred oaths of loyalty are confined to the bottom of the pit.

The community that emerges from the confessional discourse of court society is marked by a more pronounced division between public and private life. The truths of their desire can no longer be read on the surface of their bodies. They inhabit a different regime of speech and signification. Words reveal not by resemblance but rather by representation; they lead beyond appearance to a dissimilar realm of ideas where mind, which has no extension or mass, comprehends a material world reconstructed in geometric forms. In the moral domain, the intentions of a hidden self become more important than acts themselves. Jesuits exploit the elusiveness of consent and volition in their casuistry; Jansenists are obliged to "paint the portrait of the self," defeated in advance by their own theory of representation, according to which the portrait is the absence of the object.

The confessional is emblematic of the shift from resemblance to representation. Sinner and priest no longer see each other face-to-face; instead, they conduct a ghostly conversation aimed at producing the baroque spiritual encounter, the *cor ad cor* conversation described by St. François de Sales or the imperative of self-portraiture indicated by Nicole. This new confessional discourse first spread among the elite of court society. It was also secularized and absorbed by the divine right monarchy. In the plays of Corneille and Racine, we see an ambiguous sacred/profane confessional *dispositif* at work. The neoclassic stage, which, like the confessional, creates the position of the "obscene" spectator, is witness to the psychological drama of the courtiers. In this new interiorizing theater, an aristocratic elite employs confessional techniques to gain mastery over its passions. They are like the monks except that they are engaged in political instead of spiritual combat. Conspiracies and networks of influence are being formed instead of the "perfect spiritual sonship" of monastic direction.

Corneille works out a fragile synthesis between this spiritual analysis and the monarchy. In *Cinna*, at least, *raison d'Etat* and pastoral power, the two forms of modern political rationality, are reconciled in the figure of Auguste, who is the "roi des coeurs." Racine, under the influence of the tortuous Jansenist theology of confession, creates a tragic world in the grip of Minos. Agrippine, Roxane, Mithridate, and Thésée are cruel inquisitors; for Eriphile and Phèdre, the *mise en discours* of desire and the discovery of the self are modern versions of the

tragic destiny. The inexorable fate of Greek tragedy is exacted by the obligation to confess. In *Phèdre*, Minos represents this combination of ancient fatality and Christian confession. Every time Phèdre confesses, she advances toward her destruction. It is Minos "à sa proie attaché."

In the current historical debate about court society, I have attempted a reinterpretation of Elias's repressive model of the civilizing process. For me, the legacy of the courtiers is the development of a public language for the analysis of the passions. Like the bourgeois who succeeded them, their consciousness as an elite was marked by a discursive overproduction of sexuality. Herein also lies the erotic appeal of their literature. It is not about "bienséances" and "autocontrainte"; rather, it is a new erotic based on the baroque/psychoanalytic idea that "il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel." There is only language, which "supplée à l'inexistence du rapport sexuel."

The eighteenth century understood this ambiguity. Sade and Restif de la Bretonne recount scenes of sex in the confessional. Our own age still finds pleasure in the grip of Minos; the telephone has been eroticized just as the confessional was.²

For modern society, confession is still the proof of hell or the promise of heaven. Burning pitch and the Styx speak only to our literary memory, but facing up to the self through confession is still programmatic in our social and psychological schemes. When Sartre's Joseph Garcin arrives in hell, he asks where the stakes and grills are. They have all disappeared, but Minos still haunts the "salon bourgeois," stripped of all furniture except the Freudian *dispositif*, the "canapé." Garcin himself initiates confession: "Tant que chacun de nous n'aura pas avoué pourquoi ils l'ont condamné, nous ne saurons rien. Toi la blonde, commence . . ." (47). Avowal is still a valid tool for proving the truth of Sartre's existentialist lesson that life is the sum of free acts, not good intentions. We are still in the grip of Minos. Society wouldn't exist without his knowledge and his power. Garcin the inquisitor or Inès the seductress: "Je suis le miroir aux alouettes; ma petite alouette, je te tiens!" (43). Hell is not so much "les autres" as it is "l'aveu."

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. All citations of Freud are from the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* and are referred to by volume and page number.
2. Lacan also insists on the difference between spiritual direction and psychoanalysis: "La direction de conscience, au sens du guide moral qu'un fidèle du catholicisme peut y trouver, est ici exclue radicalement. . . . La direction de la cure est autre chose" ("Direction" 586).
3. See chap. 1 for a further discussion of the techniques of spiritual direction in Eastern monasticism.
4. The full passage in Latin: "Ipse quidem voce de sepulcro suscitavit, ipse clamando animam reddidit, ipse terrenam molem sepulto impositam vicit, et processit ille vincit: non ergo pedibus propriis, sed virtute producentis. Fit hoc in corde poenitentis: cum audis hominem poenitere peccatorum suorum, jam revixit; cum audis hominem confitendo proferre conscientiam, jam de sepulcro eductus est, sed nondum solutus est" (Migne, *PL* 37.1306).
5. See chap. 4 for further discussion of *anagnorisis*.
6. All text and translations of Dante throughout this study are taken from the John D. Sinclair edition.

CHAPTER 1

1. Compare with Duby:

Mais peut-on imaginer révolution plus radicale et d'un effet plus profond et prolongé sur les attitudes mentales que le passage d'une cérémonie aussi ostentatoire que l'avait été la pénitence publique—succédant à la reconnaissance publique de la faute, elle introduisait

dans un état social particulier ouvertement désigné par certaines manières de se conduire, un vêtement, des gestes, bref, tout un spectacle d'exclusion monté sur la scène publique—à ce simple dialogue, celui des *exempla*, entre le pécheur et le prêtre, c'est-à-dire entre l'âme et Dieu, confession auriculaire, de bouche à oreille, un secret inviolable, l'aveu ne comptant que s'il préludait à un travail de rectification, d'émondage livré par la personne en silence à l'intérieur d'elle-même? ("Situation" 525)

2. See Groupe de la Bussière.
3. See Jameson's "Religion and Ideology."
4. On the sociology of confession and the theme of inclusion and exclusion, see Hepworth and Turner.
5. See Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in *L'Écriture et la différence*.
6. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discusses how ascetic ideals became "life-affirming" ("Ja-schaffende"): "This ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this denier—precisely he is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life" (120). My work is an attempt to show specifically how the ascetic ideal involves a yes-creating on the level of discourse, a "yes-saying."
7. According to Janet,

Les religions dans l'organisation des couvents ont toujours donné une place importante à la personne du supérieur; les anciennes morales comme celle du stoïcisme comprenaient fort bien le rôle du directeur de conscience; la religion catholique ne s'est pas bornée à instituer la confession, mais elle a recommandé au fidèle de conserver le même confesseur et a perfectionné la conception du directeur de conscience, Ignace de Loyola, Saint François de Sales, Bossuet, Fénelon savaient fort bien l'importance de la continuité dans le traitement des scrupuleux, beaucoup mieux dirigés quand ils étaient entre les mains d'un confesseur qui les connaissait depuis longtemps. (Qtd. in Schaller 91)
8. "La porta che chiude la fenditura nella roccia simboleggia la confessione sacramentale come accesso al sentiero della purificazione progressiva dell'uomo peccatore durante questa vita, prima di giungere all'unione perfetta con Dio" (Meersseman 141).
9. See "Dante as Confessor" in Paolini 82.
10. "Dante descrive minutamente questo sacramento (Pg IX 70–147), seguendo qualche *Ordo reconciliationis poenitentium* o *Ordo ad dandam poenitentiam*, cioè rituale o manuale usato dai penitenzieri romani incaricati di confessare i romei (letteratura non ancora studiata dai liturgisti per l'epoca di Dante)" (Meersseman 141).
11. Dante uses the term *contrapasso* in *Inferno* XXVIII 142, where Bertran de Born explains that his ghastly punishment—he is decapitated and carries his head in his hand—is ordained by divine justice: "Così s'osserva in me la contrapasso" ("Thus is observed in me the

retribution"). Dante's primary source for the idea of the *contrapasso* came through St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* (III-II, q. 612, art. 4), where the saint conflates the Aristotelian idea of reciprocal justice with the *lex talionis* of the Old Testament, implicitly contrasting it with the "turning-the-other-cheek" exhortation of the New Law: "I answer that retaliation (*contrapassum*) denotes equal suffering in repayment for previous action; and the expression applies most properly to injurious sufferings and actions, whereby a man harms the person of his neighbor; for instance, if a man strike, that he be struck back. This kind of justice is laid down in the Law (Exodus 21: 23-4): He shall render life for life, eye for eye, etc. And since also to take away what belongs to another is to do something unjust, it follows that, secondly, retaliation (*contrapassum*) consists in this also that whoever causes loss to another, should suffer loss in his belongings. This just loss is also found in the Law (Exodus, 21: 1)." (Cassell 3)

See also Singleton, *Commentary* 2:522-25.

12. The legend of Theseus will be discussed further in chap. 4 in relation to Racine's *Phèdre*. See Eisler, Arthur Evans, Faure, Hawkes, Marinatos, Nichols, Nilsson, and Rohrich-Leavitt for further information about Minoan civilization and the legends of Theseus and Minos.
13. For discussions of the Greek and Roman beliefs concerning life after death, see Cumont, Clark.
14. As R. G. Austin puts it,
The language is meant to suggest Roman court procedure: Heyne notes ps.-Asconius' *argumentum* of Cic. *Verr.* ii. I (p. 61, Klotz): "ad hanc enim similitudinem poeta Vergilius Minoem iudicem apud inferos, tamquam si praetor sit rerum capitalium, quaesitorem appellat; dat ibi sortitionem, ubi urnam nominat, dat electionem iudicum, cum dicit *consilium vocat*, dat cognitionem facinorum, cum dicit *vitaeque et crimina discit*." Virgil plainly imagines a ghostly tribunal in formal session, to review the cases of those *falso damnati crimine mortis*. Their condemnation by an earthly tribunal would presumably have destined them as sinners to Tartarus; now, instead, they are allocated to the "neutral" region. (156)
15. "La parola denota in verità il possesso di un sapere ben approfondito in campo morale, di una vaste e scaltrita esperienza intorno alla casistica dei peccati, premessa di un giudizio rigoroso e infallibile (Minos, a cui fallar non lece, XXIX 120): tutto ciò va sottinteso al valore di 'giudice,' attribuito comunemente al vocabolo" (Consoli 154).
16. For further discussion of the fresco, see Marinatos, *Minoan Religion* 71-75.
17. I tratti grotteschi (ma—si badi—non comici) della rappresentazione dantesca di Minos culminano nel particolare della coda (un'innovazione dell'Alighieri di cui non è facile rendersi ragione, a fronte del virgiliano, e generalmente classico, 'urnam movet'), che Minos at-

torce intorno a sé per tanti giri quanti cerchi il colpevole deve scendere nell'abisso: gesto forse di per sé inutile, se la sentenza é pronunciata anche a viva voce (come parrebbe, almeno per la precisazione del girone o della parte del cerchio cui l'anima è destinata: cfr. *Inf.* XXVII 127). (Padoan 963)

18. See Salsano for discussion of the many interpretations of Minos's tail.
19. "Tisiphone quatit insultans, torvosque sinistra / intentans anguis vocat agmina saeva sororum" (*Aen.* 6.571–72).
20. Freccero discusses the eucharistic parody in the Ugolino episode in "Bestial Sign and Bread of Angels: *Inferno* XXXII and XXXIII" (*Dante* 152–66).
21. It is a law of the unconscious that words are often treated like things. In the case history of the Rat-Man, for example, the rats in the obsessional neurotic's story represent an array of words related to his case; the *Ratten* (rats) are also *Raten* (installment payments), *Spielratte* (gambling debts), and signify his fear of marriage, *heiraten* (Freud 10:213–14). Lacan also devotes considerable attention to this process in his writings: "Les mots peuvent eux-mêmes subir les lésions symboliques, accomplir les actes imaginaires dont le patient est le sujet. On se souvient de la *Wespe* (guêpe) castrée de son W initial pour devenir le S.P. des initiales de l'homme aux loupes, au moment où il réalise la punition symbolique dont il a été l'objet de la part de Grousha, la guêpe" (*Ecrits* 1:183).
22. Piero's barren metamorphosis contrasts ironically with his surname, "della Vigna" or "de Vinea" ("vineyard" or "vine"). Although modern commentators have ignored this aspect as, perhaps, too primitive or naive, during Piero's life his family name offered a fertile field for puns of adulation; and after his death it became the source of many a frivolous tale in the chroniclers. . . . His friend Nicola della Rocca indulged himself and the Notary with "O blessed root which hath brought forth such a fruitful branch, O blessed vine [felix vinea] . . ." (Cassell 34)
23. Mitchell Greenberg has brought it to my attention that the term *Thanatos* never actually occurs in Freud's published works. It appears that he referred to it in conversation.
24. Les chrétiens de l'époque féodale, ceux du moins dont on peut connaître les attitudes, se tiennent devant la puissance divine dans les postures rituelles de qui fait dédition de soi: comme les chevaliers qui se confient au maître du château, ils sont à genoux, volontiers mains jointes, attendant récompense, espérant être entretenus dans l'autre monde paternellement, aspirant à s'introduire dans le privé de Dieu, dans sa *familia*, mais au degré convenant à l'ordre dont ils font partie, c'est-à-dire au bas d'une hiérarchie de soumission. . . . Le peuple dévot prit ainsi figure, irrésistiblement, d'une immense maisonnée démultipliée en diverses demeures, placées chacune sous la protection d'un saint ou de la Vierge, accueillantes, englobantes, elles aussi tentaculaires, et le rêve s'est déployé au long du XIe siècle

d'introduire l'humanité tout entière dans les multiples casiers de la domesticité céleste. (Duby, "Féodalité" 39-40)

CHAPTER 2

1. "Imaginary" and "Symbolic" are Jacques Lacan's well-known, if elusive, concepts of psychical organization in which human relations are governed simultaneously by the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. These can be described schematically as (1) real historical circumstances; (2) imaginary, primarily visual relations of substitution; and finally, (3) symbolic relations that are governed by the impersonal code of signs. It should be stressed that, for Lacan, these aspects of reality always occur at once; there is no unmediated or originary experience of the Real, the Imaginary, or the Symbolic.
2. For Martha Noel Evans, Lacan's commentary on the ecstasy of St. Teresa in *Encore* marks the inability of psychoanalysis to understand female desire and a last attempt by Lacan, at the end of his career, to let the female unconscious speak by colluding with the hysteric: "The discourse of psychoanalysis fused with the discourse of hysteria where knowledge melted into a swoon" (196). Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, although attacking Luce Irigaray and "feminists" (298), takes the same position: "Lacan located the hysteric's discourse close to the analyst's, that is, close to the search for being in terms of unconscious truth. Lacan claimed that his own discourse was grounded in the structures both of the hysteric and the analyst" (305).
3. For an interesting study of the telephone as a materialization and territorialization of modern philosophical discourse, see Ronell.
4. See "True Confessions by Telephone," *Time* 3 Oct. 1988: 85. The article relates how a Los Angeles service receives "200 anonymous calls a day from people admitting everything from marital infidelity to murder. On another number, callers pay \$2.00 for the first minute and \$.45 a minute after that to listen to confessions. The second number receives up to 10,000 calls a day."
5. This distinction should be respected in modern usage, according to the *Lit-tré*: "Aveu est plus général que confession; il s'applique à tout ce que l'on avait dessein de cacher, bon ou mauvais. La confession ne s'applique qu'au mal, à un tort, à un méchef. Aussi la torture, la menace arrachent non une confession, mais des aveux." Torture extracts an *aveu* because the person being tortured could perfectly well be hiding something that in itself is innocent but desired by an oppressive inquisitor. Confession, on the other hand, implies a transcendental evaluation of the hidden fact as being in itself sinful.
6. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin mentions confession under the category of "expositives," a type of "highly developed explicit performative" (86). To be classified as such, an utterance must in itself accomplish a certain conventional act. Confession meets this criterion: by pronouncing

the words of confession in the correct setting one is formally entering into a contract with diverse consequences depending upon the context. The performative utterance can also function only in the first person, since only the speaker or subject of enunciation can verbally commit himself. Confession, for example, can only be performed by saying "I confess," and not "He confesses."

7. On this subject see Apostolidès, Bloch, and Kantorowicz.
8. See also Lebrun's article in the same volume, which discusses the importance of confession and the confessional in the religious reforms of the seventeenth century.
9. "Wenceslas, roi de Bohême, voulait savoir ce que la princesse Jeanne son épouse avait dit à confesse. Il employa les prières, les promesses, les menaces; toutes ses instances furent inutiles. Saint Jean Népomucène fut mis à mort, il devint martyr du secret de la confession" (Pontas 595).

CHAPTER 3

1. All citations of Corneille, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Stegmann.
2. All citations of Racine, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Picard.
3. "Le lieu le plus retiré dans le plus bel appartement des palais, des grandes maisons" (Furetière). According to the *Petit Robert*, the word "cabinet," as used here by Corneille, was first introduced in 1627.
4. "The exile is not simply excluded from a material area of contact; he is chased out of a human environment measured off by the law. Henceforth the exile will no longer haunt the human space of the fatherland; where the fatherland ends, there his defilement also ceases" (Ricoeur, *Symbolism* 40).
5. See Greenberg for a discussion of Jason as narcissistic type, although he does not treat Medea as a return to primitive narcissism (27).
6. For Gilles Deleuze, "Schizophrenia is the universe of productive and re-productive desiring-machines, universal primary production as 'the essential reality of man and nature'" (5).
7. In *Le Prince sacrifié*, Apostolidès traces the concept of the "roi-prêtre" from the Middle Ages down to the seventeenth century.
8. See Esmein for further discussion of "abolition" and royal justice (435).
9. English Protestants called the Jesuit casuists "king killers" because some of them defended the use of force against an unjust king. See Leites 106.
10. Apostolidès describes how confession itself was part of the royal sacré: "La vieille métaphore du mariage mystique unissant l'évêque à son siège est reprise pour définir les liens entre le roi et l'Etat, ce dernier étant lui-même interprété comme un corps mystique. D'où le strict rituel qui entoure le sacrement de l'onction: le monarque doit être en état de grâce pour le re-

cevoir; il jeûne et se confesse avant de revêtir les insignes de la royauté" (*Prince* 12, emphasis added).

11. In the *Examen* of 1660, Corneille mentions this scene and comments on the abuse of avowal scenes as a theatrical expedient to provide the spectator with background information:

Sa confidence [Pauline's] avec Stratonice, touchant l'amour qu'elle avait eu pour ce cavalier, me fait faire une réflexion sur le temps qu'elle prend pour cela. Il s'en fait beaucoup sur nos théâtres, d'affections qui ont déjà duré deux ou trois ans, dont on attend à révéler le secret justement au jour de l'action qui se présente, et non seulement sans aucune raison de choisir ce jour-là plutôt qu'un autre pour le déclarer, mais lors même que vraisemblablement on s'en est dû ouvrir beaucoup auparavant avec la personne à qui on en fait confidence. Ce sont choses dont il faut instruire le spectateur en les faisant apprendre par un des acteurs à l'autre, mais il faut prendre garde avec soin que celui à qui on les apprend ait eu lieu de les ignorer jusque-là aussi bien que le spectateur et que quelque occasion tirée du sujet oblige celui qui les récite à rompre enfin un silence qu'il a gardé si longtemps. (292)

12. See Greenberg for an interesting discussion of Pauline's dream. I concur that it contains erotic, rebellious elements, but I disagree with his idea that her "female pleasure" is fulfilled by the play's ending: "This pleasure reveals (as it does for Emilie, for Camille) the destructive Medea that is hidden in all of Corneille's heroines" (143). For me, Pauline is the antithesis of Medea in her passage through the discourse of confession, which, as I pointed out, Medea specifically rejects. I would agree that there are utopian, revolutionary aspects of Pauline and Polyucte's vision, but they must not be confused with the tragic, demonic force of Medea.
13. Rousseau explores the perverse possibilities of this model in the incident of the stolen comb in the *Confessions*. There, the shame of confession is enjoyed as masochistic pleasure, and the very enterprise of the *Confessions* becomes suspect. See de Man 278–301.

CHAPTER 4

1. "Comme Jésus-Christ nous apprend que le démon nous suit partout, [Messieurs ont] toujours quelque ange visible auprès d'eux, soit de jour, soit de nuit, soit à la chambre, soit à l'église, soit dans les divertissements, soit dans les visites et enfin jusque dans les nécessités les plus secrètes" (Lancelot, qtd. in Snyder 45). Marin comments: "A vrai dire, le maître n'est pas cet ange visible dont parle Lancelot à propos de ses élèves, mais cet invisible qui rend visible ce qui, dans les comportements, pourrait rester caché et, du coup, échapper à la clôture du modèle" (*Critique* 213).

2. On the meaning of dissection in Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* and its importance to all forms of bodily representation in the seventeenth century, see Barker.
3. L'anatomie, au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle, a perdu le rôle recteur qu'elle avait à la Renaissance et qu'elle retrouvera à l'époque de Cuvier . . . la disposition fondamentale du visible et de l'énonçable ne passe plus par l'épaisseur du corps. De là la préséance épistémologique de la botanique: c'est que l'espace commun aux mots et aux choses constituait pour les plantes une grille beaucoup plus accueillante, beaucoup moins "noire" que pour les animaux; dans la mesure où beaucoup d'organes constitutifs sont visibles sur la plante que ne le sont pas chez les animaux. (Foucault, *Mots* 149)
4. "Male psychic development and male fantasies, including those of his genitalia, are taken as the standard model of the human psyche. In Freud's theory, because the male's genitals are easily visible and those of the female are not, she seems not to possess any at all. Not only is the male valuation of *visibility* projected onto woman to her disadvantage, so also are his sexual fears" (M. N. Evans 211, emphasis added).
5. Timothy Reiss believes that the seraglio represents a state of nature without political structure: "The beginning of Racine's *Bajazet* corresponds rather closely to that moment in the Hobbesian monarchical state when the prince's protection of his individual subjects has been suspended and they find themselves as a consequence returned to the condition of permanent war in which natural law holds sway: the individual must defend and protect himself, must seek the imposition of his own power" (219). For me, the seraglio is, on the contrary, a sophisticated *dispositif* that governs its inhabitants most efficaciously by employing calculated amounts of physical restraint, fear, and surveillance. It manages to smother all opposition, even that plotted by its apparent master—Roxane.
6. Racine uses poetic licence here, dropping the *g* from *seing*, the correct spelling for the word, to produce the graphic similarity between the two kinds of *sein*.
7. The use of the letter as a model for the unconscious and the analytic skill involved in discovering it are reminiscent of Lacan's essay on Poe's "Purloined Letter":

Ce que Freud nous enseigne dans le texte que nous commentons, c'est que le sujet suit la filière du symbolique, mais ce dont vous avez ici l'illustration est plus saisissant encore: ce n'est pas seulement le sujet, mais les sujets, pris dans leur intersubjectivité, qui prennent la file, autrement dit nos autruches, auxquelles nous voilà revenus, et qui, plus dociles que des moutons, modèlent leur être même sur le moment qui les parcourt de la chaîne signifiante. . . . Notre apologue est fait pour montrer que c'est la lettre et son détour qui régit leurs entrées et leurs rôles. Qu'elle soit en souffrance, c'est eux qui vont en pâtir. A passer sous son ombre, ils deviennent son reflet. A tomber

en possession de la lettre,—admirable ambiguïté du langage,—c'est son sens qui les possède. (*Ecrits* 1:40–41)

8. Freud describes the first metonymic "propping up against" (*Anlehnung*) of the sexual drives on the instinct of preservation: "At its origin it attaches itself to one of the vital somatic functions; and its sexual aim is dominated by an erotogenic zone" (7:182).
9. "Alexandre, Andromaque, Britannicus, Bérénice, Bajazet, Mithridate sont des pièces formées, malgré l'empreinte d'un génie très personnel, sur un modèle tout moderne et français qui a presque oublié, sinon renié, ses lointains ascendants grecs. . . . Mais *Iphigénie*, mais *Phèdre*, se donnent, et en somme avec quelque justesse, comme bâties, pour le plan comme pour les données, sur des tragédies toutes faites, des tragédies d'Euripide" (Knight 325).
10. Girard's own discussion of the medieval scapegoating of Jews would suggest that the old mechanism survived in Christian cultures. See his discussion in "Guillaume de Machaut et les juifs" (*Bouc* 7–21).
11. Apostolidès aptly describes the marginalization of Eriphile:
Avec Eriphile, c'est tout un monde trouble, alternatif, ambigu, qui est sacrifié. Amante d'Achille, Eriphile mêlait ensemble ses sentiments incompatibles, l'horreur et l'amour, la violence et la douceur, le sang et le sperme. . . . Chez Eriphile, amour et haine sont liés comme Eros et Thanatos. . . . En sacrifiant Eriphile, le pôle religieux prend en charge ce qui relève de l'inconscient, l'irrationnel, le trouble, l'excès, et le met au service de l'Etat. ("Belle" 152)
12. See Barbara Woshinsky's "Iphigénie Transcendent" for a discussion of this point: "Neither Aeschylus nor Euripides refers to Iphigenia's sacrifice in this way. It is a 'straight' human sacrifice, if one may use this expression, with no augury involved. Euripides' *Electra*, however, which Racine had reread and annotated prior to composing *Iphigénie*, does contain a graphic description of sacrificial augury" (90).
13. For an analysis of French classicism from the perspective of the Freudian family romance, see Greenberg, *Subjectivity*.
14. For example, Hardison:
Recognition of persons takes us far from the kind of self-knowledge that figures like Oedipus or Lear are supposed to attain by their suffering. The concept should be understood in its narrow sense. It means just what it says. In *Oedipus*, which is atypical, the hero recognizes himself. He does not gain insight as a result of the information supplied by the messenger, he simply learns who he is. He learns that he is the son of Laius, whom he has slain, and the son of Jocasta, whom he has married. The typical Greek recognition is a recognition of one character by another, and what is more, the characters are usually blood relations. (171)
15. For example, Kaufman writes: "Aristotle, for all his preoccupation with 'recognition,' stayed at the surface. He discusses this phenomenon as a part of stagecraft, as a device used in many tragedies, and most effectively

in *Oedipus*. But he failed to see how recognition is in this tragedy not merely a matter of superb technique but, along with blindness, of the very substance of the play" (139).

16. Vinaver even argues that Racine's different conception of *anagnorisis* led him to mistranslate the passage on that subject in the *Poetics* (50–51).
17. Homer's Minos as described by Odysseus: "Here lived King Minos whom great Zeus received every ninth month in private council—Minos, the father of my father, Deucalion" (bk. 19). The hero of the *Odyssey* also meets him in the Underworld: "There then I saw Minos, the glorious son of Zeus, golden sceptre in hand, giving judgment to the dead from his seat, while they sat and stood about the king through the wide-gated house of Hades and asked of him judgment" (bk. 11).
18. See Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture* for a discussion of the association between architecture, sacrifice, and Western philosophy in the work of Georges Bataille. For further information about animal sacrifice in Crete see Marinatos, *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual*.
19. In addition to the tale of Pasiphaë and the bull, there are other stories associated with the king of Crete:

Minos had a large number of amorous adventures and is said to have been the originator of homosexuality. In one tradition Minos rather than Zeus abducted Ganymede. He is also said to have been the lover of Theseus and was supposedly reconciled with him after Ariadne's abduction and gave him his second daughter in marriage. His mistresses were so numerous that Pasiphaë became angry; she cast a spell on him which caused all the women whom he possessed to die, devoured by the scorpions and snakes which emerged from his body. (Grimal 291)

See also chapter 1, p. 63 for a discussion of Minoan Crete as a matriarchal state.

20. Even the term Minotaur may be more than linguistic fancy, for there are a few half-men, half-bull representations in Minoan art. In the opinion of commentators on the ritual content of myths, the Minotaur is the remembrance of a cult ceremony in which the Cretan priest-king donned the mask of a bull. Annually (or once every eight years?) the king defended his crown against new claimants by engaging in a symbolic combat, during which he wore an elaborate representation of the sacred animal. The memory of that solemn event, it is believed, was encapsulated in the Theseus myth. (Nichols 122)
21. It is my belief that the combination of Christian and pagan elements in *Phèdre* symbolizes the ambiguous appropriation of sacred forms by the monarchy. Jean Delumeau comments that "dans les structures d'Ancien Régime, Eglise et Etat se confondaient." He observes that one result of the confusion between Church and state was the production of cultural hybrids, in his words, "le syncrétisme religieux et le mélange, souvent déton-

nant, du sacré et du profane" (*Christianisme* 73). He sees these mixed productions as symptoms of the Church's political ambitions and an overall attempt to subjugate society as a whole, which he likens to trying to "faire entrer des millions de gens dans un immense monastère" (71). The role of confession within court society does corroborate this image of an "immense monastère."

Racine's tragedies represent the union of the sacred and profane as an unholy alliance. Either the Church is too political and unworthy of the believer's confidence (Mathan is such a figure of the political cleric) or the state is depicted as being invasive and abusive of the sacred conscience—the state as voyeur and spy. Vigny's scene in which Cinq-Mars unknowingly confesses to Richelieu's spy is in the same spirit as Racine's plays.

22. Compare St. François de Sales: "Si vous pouvez découvrir votre inquiétude à celui qui conduit votre âme, ou au moins à quelque confident et dévot ami, ne doutez point que tout aussitôt vous ne soyez accoisée; car la communication des douleurs de coeur fait le même effet en l'âme que la saignée fait au corps de celui qui est en fièvre continuë; c'est le remède des remèdes" (*Introduction* 315).
23. Again I cite Foucault at length on the uniqueness of the Christian obligation to confess:

As everybody knows, Christianity is a confession. This means that Christianity belongs to a very special type of religion—those which impose obligations of truth on those who practise them. Such obligations in Christianity are numerous. For instance, there is the obligation to hold as truth a set of propositions which constitute dogma, the obligation to hold certain books as a permanent source of truth and obligations to accept the decisions of certain authorities in matters of truth. But Christianity requires another form of truth obligation. Everyone in Christianity has the duty to explore who he is, what is happening within himself, the fault he has committed, the temptations to which he is exposed. Moreover everyone is obliged to tell these things to other people, and hence to bear witness against himself. . . . The more we discover the truth about ourselves, the more we have to renounce ourselves; and the more we want to renounce ourselves, the more we need to bring to light the reality of ourselves. ("Sexuality and Solitude" 5)

24. See May and, more recently, DeJean.
25. Stephen Greenblatt also sees a rapport between Loudun and *Phèdre*: Theater and exorcism were nonetheless culturally juxtaposed, sharing specific techniques and forms, and this proximity has its dialectical consequences. What is excluded from theatrical representation in seventeenth-century France may make itself felt in what is actually represented; I refer, for example, to the pervasive presence of the pagan deities, who were, after all, most often identified in Christian theology as demons. . . . The greatest image of possession in French

drama of the period is that of "Venus tout entière à sa proie attachée," and for this possession there is no exorcism. ("Loudun" 343-44)

26. "Adjuvant" and "opposant" designate two structural possibilities of the "actant" in A. J. Greimas's morphological model of narratives.
27. "La place du roi" was the name given to the ideal position from which a perspectivist painting was to be observed. The idea that any field of rationality should be organized from the point of view of one sovereign subject was central to the ideology of representation during the classical age. See Foucault, *Mots*; Goux.

CONCLUSION

1. "This aim of undoing is the second underlying motive of obsessional ceremonies, the first being to take precautions in order to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of some particular event" (Freud 20:119).
2. See, for example, the recent erotic novel *Vox*, by Nicholson Baker (1992, Random House), consisting solely of telephone conversations.

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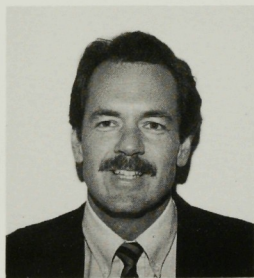
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Matthew Senior is assistant professor of French at the University of New Orleans.

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ISBN 0-8142-0637-9



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